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THE

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT:

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A

TREATISE ON THE EVIDENCE OF THE BELIEVER'S ADOPTION.

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INTRODUCTION.

In the following treatise, the reader's attention is directed to the consideration of a very solemn inquiry, and one which must, we may suppose, have presented itself, at some time or other, to every spirit that is not utterly a stranger to all serious piety. It is this:—Am I now in the favor of God? Having been adopted into the divine family, do I now sustain the character of an heir of everlasting glory? Of all the questions that ever were asked or answered, this must be allowed to be among the most important.

But is it possible, on a subject of such vital interest, to obtain, in the present life, a satisfactory assurance? Or, must we remain, at most, in trembling hope and uncertainty, till the light of eternity dispel our darkness, or till the decision of the last day fix our everlasting condition?

On this point, we think, the Scripture affords us ample direction; and it will be our object to show that no anxious fears, resulting from uncertainty of our present condition and relationship toward God, need remain on any Christian mind.

Were this a matter sufficiently understood by the Christian world in general,—were the sincere

followers of Christ all duly apprised of their privilege, and encouraged to seek it,—we cannot but think that the religion of the Lord Jesus would be exhibited in a more attractive form, as well as attended with a more abundant inward consolation.

It is probably true that, of the entire number of evangelical Christians now upon earth, the far greater part do actually content themselves with an experience of religion in which the joyful persuasion of God's love to them has no part. Is this, then, Scriptural and right? If the answer be given in the negative, we further ask,—"Deeply to be regretted as this state of things is, is it necessary and inevitable?"

Some might be inclined to say, that what is the general standard of actual attainment among Christians must be supposed to be, and ought to be taken to be, the utmost of Christian privilege that is to be anticipated. This inference is, however, we think, totally incorrect. We cannot deem it safe to take the prevailing religious experience, any more than the prevailing practice of any portion of the Christian church, as indicating the Scriptural standard. We must go directly to the law and to the testimony.

The writer would be much averse to giving needless offense at the outset of his work; but

he craves the indulgence of his readers while he states his decided opinion, that far the greater portion of Christ's disciples are, at this day, living in a state much below what it is their privilege to enjoy. And this observation is intended to apply, not merely to that portion of the Christian church which is notoriously defective in evangelical views of the other leading doctrines of the gospel, but in great part, also, to that portion of it in which the saving truth of our free justification by faith is well understood and taught. It would seem to follow of course, from the belief that we are justified freely on our believing in the atonement, that a conscious enjoyment of the "peace of God" would plainly appear to be our portion. But it is a fact, that multitudes who believe the former, have yet no conception that the latter is their privilege. Even that portion of the church of Christ which holds his saving doctrines in general correctly, does not seem to have been benefited by the experience of the last hundred years, during which the mighty work of a revival of primitive religion has been going on. Accompanying that revival, in its first manifestation, was the recovery and the reasserting of the doctrine of the Spirit as testifying the believer's adoption. This was taught and enforced, perhaps almost equally, by Whitefield and by Wesley; for

their views on this point, in the first instance, appear to have been almost identically the same. There is reason to believe, that the system of doctrine which Whitefield taught has not of late years been exhibited by his followers exactly as it was by that great preacher. The same prominence has not been given to the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, as was given to it in his preaching and writings. His biographer, Mr. Philip, allows this, and justifies it on the ground that he thinks, on this point, Mr. Whitefield went too far.* From an examination of his writings, it would appear that he went just as far in the announcement of this doctrine as Mr. Wesley himself; and if he did not attempt so logical a defense of it, he, at least, declared it with equal fidelity. In his letter to the clergy of the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry, (Works, vol. iv, p. 180,) after quoting Galatians iv, 6,—"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father;" he adds,—"Does not this quite clear up that passage of Romans viii, 15, about the witnessing Spirit and the Spirit of adoption, viz.: that believers, besides

* "It is needless," says Mr. Philip, (Life of Whitefield, p. 333,) "to analyze or characterize Whitefield's answer to the bishop. It is enough to say, that it is full of the great doctrines of the Reformation. Even where it pleads for too much of the direct witness of the Spirit, it is more than excusable."

seeing the miracles which the apostles wrought, had an inward testimony of the Holy Ghost? he making an inward application of the merits of Christ to their souls, and giving them an inward testimony that they were indeed the adopted sons of God, and therefore, in a holy confidence, they might cry, Abba, Father! Is there anything forced in this interpretation? And, consequently, may not persons assert that there is such a thing as a witness or testimony of the Spirit given to our own consciences, to prove that private Christians are the sons of God and heirs of salvation, without being censured for so doing as modern enthusiasts?"

Again, (page 187,) "It is true his lordship" (the bishop of Lichfield and Coventry) "does talk, here and there, of the blessed Spirit and of his ordinary influences; but what are his ordinary operations if he is neither to dwell in us, nor to give us an inward testimony in our hearts that we are born of God?"

So again, in his remarks on a pamphlet entitled "Enthusiasm of the Methodists and Papists compared," he says, (vol. iv, p. 241,) "Need you be informed that one grand article of the Council of Trent is this,—'That there is no such thing as a person's knowing that his sins are forgiven him, or being assured of his salvation?'

And that with good reason. For if there be such a thing as being assured of the forgiveness of our sins by the internal testimony, whether mediate or immediate, of the Spirit of God, and if a person ought to be satisfied only with *that*, then how could the people be brought to believe in, and trust to, the mere external, verbal absolution of a priest? Our church, on the contrary, in one of her homilies, says, that 'a true faith is a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God.' And that the Scriptures everywhere promise to believers a sure and internal witness from the Spirit of God, to witness with their spirits that they are his children, is so evident, that he who runs may read."

Such was apparently the doctrine which Whitefield announced with so much power in the early times of his ministry, when his preaching, in the intensity of its effect, produced results which have seldom, if ever, been equaled since the days of the apostles.

If we look back from the date of Whitefield's labors to a period more remote, we shall obtain a glimpse of what was taught eighty years previously, by the evangelical portion of the church, in reference to this important privilege. Bunyan,

although he makes his pilgrim carry his burden of guilt during the first part of his journey, yet plainly intimates that the removal of guilt from the conscience, and the inward testimony of this relative change, are necessary to the believer's pursuing his heavenward journey with alacrity.

"So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.' Then he stood still awhile, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the water down his cheeks. Now, as he stood looking and weeping, behold three shining ones came to him and saluted him with 'Peace be to thee.' So the first said to him, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee;' the second stripped him of his rags and clothed him with a change of raiment; the third, also, set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran,

and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate; so they went on their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing—

> 'Thus far did I come, laden with my sin,
> Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in
> Till I came hither:—what a place is this!
> Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
> Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be
> The man that there was put to shame for me!'"

The last century has doubtless introduced many improvements in systematic divinity; but it is doubtful whether there has been the same improvement in the experimental piety of Christians in general, as compared with the times of Wesley and Whitefield. There has, at least, in one portion of the church, been a declining from those cheering views of Christian privilege, in reference to the witness of the Spirit to the believer's adoption which prevailed among professing Christians at the commencement of this great work of God, whether they held Arminian or Calvinistic sentiments in other respects.

But this departure from the teaching of a century ago may be thought, by some, to be an improvement. It may be said that the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit was one of those extremes into which a newly awakened zeal led those early evangelists; and the apprehension

may be felt, (we believe, indeed, is felt,) that the doctrine is one of those which lie the most open to enthusiastic abuses.

We are persuaded that this is a most unfounded apprehension. We hope to be able, on the one hand, to show the Scriptural authority of the doctrine, and on the other, to quiet the fears of those who dread the abuse of it. There can, indeed, be no danger of this, if the doctrine be taught scripturally; that is, if it be taught with those guards which Holy Scripture directs us to apply, in coming to a solemn decision upon our Scriptural state.

It is, no doubt, true, that the most vital and saving doctrines are precisely those which are most liable to be perverted. But, in this respect, the doctrine of the Spirit's operation on the mind stands but on the same ground with that of our free justification by faith, without the works of the law. The one, as well as the other, may be abused. But certainly neither of them is in any danger of being perverted where there is true Christian sincerity; for the Scripture, in these cases, and in every similar one, provides all the guards which can possibly be needed. Were the doctrine of justification by faith to be abused, to the effect of making void the moral law, as it probably was by some in the apostle's

days, yet this would be no reason for discontinuing the preaching of so vital a doctrine. It would only be requisite to show (as the apostle does) that the making void of the law does in no way follow from the doctrine itself, but is a mere abuse of it; and an abuse into which no sincere mind can ever be in any danger of falling.

Were the perversion of the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, therefore, much more frequent than we have any reason to believe it to be, it would be sufficient for us to point out a plain distinction between a line of objectionable conduct fairly chargeable upon our doctrinal opinions, and the same objectionable conduct when it results from the mere abuse of a doctrine whose direct tendency is holy. To draw, from a Scriptural truth, inferences which do by no means follow from it, or to impute to a doctrine the production of conduct which it cannot be proved to sanction, is, in every point of view, unreasonable.

Upon the whole, the reader's attention is here invited to a subject well deserving the deepest consideration of every immortal spirit. Right views are here intimately connected with right feelings; and the privilege is inseparably associated with the enjoyment of deep experimental piety.

THE

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

CHAPTER I.

THE GENERAL OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT.

God has revealed himself to us as existing in three persons:—The Father, of whom are all things,—the Son, through whom are all things,—and the Holy Ghost, by whom are all things. The inspired volume will further lead us to the conclusion, that the Holy Spirit is the adorable Agent by whom all divine operations are performed. In reference to nature, providence, and grace, this observation would probably be found to be equally true; but our present concern is with the human soul, as the subject of divine and gracious influences. Laying apart, therefore, for the present, all consideration of his influence exerted on material nature in renewing the face of the earth, we have reason to believe that, wherever there is a human spirit, there the Holy Ghost causes *his* voice to be heard, and makes his power to be felt. He is there to warn, to direct, to control. For he is

an ever-present, all-pervading Spirit; existing not only around us, but within us;—and we can no more withdraw ourselves from his presence and influence, than we can be withdrawn, as to our bodies, from the contact of the external air.

This operation of Spirit on spirit is, indeed, incomprehensible by us; because the laws of it are not fully revealed; but it is not the less real on account of the mystery in which it is involved. The mutual influence of finite minds is far from being fully understood. We know not, in a thousand instances, how one human spirit operates upon another; and the more this influence is investigated as to the laws which govern its operation, the more diversified and incomprehensible do those laws appear.

Our inability to comprehend what will probably continue, during our present state, to be involved in no small degree of obscurity should not be suffered to prevent our belief of a great Scriptural truth.

There is an influence of God, the Eternal Spirit, upon the mind of man, by which the whole of internal religion is produced. The belief or rejection of this, makes the most evident distinction between the real Christian and others. The doctrine is, therefore, a vital and fundamental one. We cannot, without renounc-

ing the clearest teachings of the inspired volume, refuse to believe that there is an operation of the Holy Spirit upon the understanding to enlighten it,—upon the will to direct and control it,—upon the affections to elevate them from earth,—upon the desires to turn them from what is sinful to what is holy.

Our more immediate purpose, at present, is indeed to speak of the Spirit in *one* of his offices, as the Spirit of adoption. But we may be the better prepared to do this with effect, if we lay the foundation of our remarks, on this specific point, in some observations touching the widely extended and pervading operations of the Holy Ghost upon the human mind.

To judge, therefore, of this matter, from Holy Scripture, we think it reasonable to conclude, that all right feeling in the human heart is, more or less directly, to be attributed to the Spirit of God. His operations, though, doubtless, most conspicuous in the transformation and renewal of his saints, are not confined to them. We think it probable, that no human being, who is found in this probationary state of human life, exists apart from the controlling influence of an ever-present power,—an influence various and diversified to an indefinite extent, but all tending to good. We apprehend that conscience

is a mysterious power speaking in the human breast with the voice of the divine Spirit, so far as it is enlightened by a revelation of the will of God. Viewed, indeed, apart from all consideration of the will of a Supreme Governor, and apart from all visitations of the Spirit, conscience would judge at random; and the motions of this inward power, whether of conviction, warning, regret, or self-condemnation, would be unmeaning, as they would be vague and uncertain. But light from heaven is continually, in a greater or less degree, beaming upon the human soul; while, in its judicial capacity, it passes sentence upon itself; and, in the court where conscience exercises her jurisdiction, the voice of the Spirit of God is heard. What are called the checks of conscience are often direct admonitions from the Spirit of God; and the decisions of the human will are frequently, we have reason to believe, controlled and directed toward a result which was far from being in the contemplation of the man himself.

How, indeed, could God govern the world, so as to accomplish, with the utmost certainty, his designs of mercy or of judgment, if all hearts (as the hearts of kings are expressly asserted to be) were not in his hands, to "turn them as the rivers of water."

Let it, however, be here observed, that we do not intend, by this view, to represent the human being as a mere machine,—acting and moving solely as it is acted upon. But what is most admirable,—worthy, indeed, of all wonder, is, that all this interposition and influence of the Spirit of God takes place so as not to destroy, in any way, the free agency of man. The visitations and suggestions of the sacred Spirit so mingle with the free volitions of the human mind, that the divine purposes are accomplished with the utmost certainty. Man pursues his own plans and purposes; and God accomplishes his own merciful designs. *Man proposes, and God disposes.*

The decisions of the human will, then, are constantly, more or less, under a divine and controlling influence. This seems to be evidently implied in the doctrine of an overruling Providence,—of a divine care extending to the most minute events,—and regulating the fall of an empire—the fall of a sparrow—or the fall of a hair. The divine government of all events, indeed, cannot be held by us, and carried out to its legitimate consequences, without inducing the belief, that man, being the object of continual care to Him who made him, is, also, the continual subject of a divine control. In the

interior recesses of his heart, the Spirit's voice is heard. In the decisions of his will, in a thousand instances, that divine Spirit exercises a benign and gracious direction. "We are the clay;" and the Ruler of all events molds us and fashions us to the accomplishment of the purposes of his own all-comprehensive mind.

In perfect correspondence with this view, let us consider how the Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit the whole of those gracious operations in man, by which he becomes a new creature, by which all old things pass away, and all things become new.

"He shall," says the Saviour, "reprove the world of sin." No sinner, we have reason to believe, goes on in his sinful courses without many misgivings, especially if his lot be cast in a country where the light of divine truth shines. The degree of power with which the Eternal Spirit reproves for sin, the brightness of the blaze of conviction which he causes to flash upon the sinner's conscience, the degree of persevering tenderness with which he woos and wins the consent of the rebellious heart to come to Christ, are, without doubt, diversified to an almost infinite extent. And to these, his general and ordinary operations, we may apply what the apostle has said (1 Cor. xii, 11) of

those that are extraordinary and miraculous, "All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."

This, however, is plainly one of his offices, to give effect to the gospel in awakening regret and alarm on account of sin. The edge of this sword of the Spirit thus becomes keen, and its power resistless. Conviction is followed by regret and sorrow. Sin is not only perceived, but rightly estimated as to its character and consequences. At the same time, a sense of thraldom and helplessness, as to any escape from it, is produced. For the Spirit convinces of a bondage from which there is no deliverance, except by the gospel. And now, the soul being brought to this sense of its utter helplessness and misery, it is further the office of the Holy Spirit to speak effectually of the condescension, the grace, and tenderness of Christ; to reveal his suitableness as a Saviour, that the wearied spirit may repose its trust in him. It is by the attractive power of the Holy Ghost that the soul is drawn to Christ, comes to Christ, and believes in Christ. The faith that brings salvation is "a faith of the operation of God;" and is exercised by the soul under the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit.

When this faith is represented as mighty to conquer the world, to work by love, to purify the heart, it must be understood to effect this only instrumentally. The Spirit of God is still the Agent by whom these mighty effects are wrought in man. He renews the soul. He causes all old things to pass away. He makes all things new. His moving upon the face of the waters, in the first creation, to bring forth the order and beauty which appeared in the primitive world, was but an emblem of that transforming and creative power by which the new creation is effected in those who believe. The latter is as truly and plainly an instance of his divine working as the former.

And, still further, the Spirit's operations upon the human mind are extended to its entire and ultimate renewal in holiness. At its first trusting in Christ, the soul obtains the implantation of a new principle—that of love to the Saviour. The entire sanctification of the human creature is but the perfect development of this principle, under the incessant influence of the Holy Ghost. It is, instrumentally, "by the truth," but immediately by the Spirit—by direct spiritual agency—that the soul is made holy. The Holy Ghost is the Sanctifier.

Many other offices does the same gracious

Spirit perform in reference to believers; on which we need not here dwell at large. He is their Guide; and they are "led by the Spirit," and "walk in the Spirit." They hear his mysterious inward voice, are warned, excited to duty, directed in difficulty, and all their steps are ordered by him.

He is the Comforter of the saints of God; promised in this character by their Saviour; sent into their hearts to reveal the hidden sources of consolation, and to speak in accents of tenderness and love to them in all their trials.

He is their Support—ministering to all believers secret supplies of spiritual energy—strengthening them with might in the inner man.

If the object of this treatise were to set forth a complete view of all the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, it would be needful to expatiate on each of these topics at some considerable length. They are only adverted to here, to prepare the mind for the reception of the doctrine which we now proceed to announce. It is the distinct office of the Holy Spirit to assure believers that they are received into the family of God; that they are pardoned—that they are invested with a title to everlasting glory. He is called the Spirit of adoption—as presiding over that gra-

cious act of God the Father, by which he constitutes us his children—as witnessing it to our souls, and sealing us unto the day of redemption, by impressing upon us the mark and stamp of Deity. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Gal. iv, 6. "Ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Rom. viii, 15.

From these and other passages, we think it appears evident that believers in those primitive days (and why should it be otherwise in these days?) were adopted into the family of God; were the sons of God; and received a clear and indubitable testimony from the Holy Spirit as to this gracious act of their adoption. What is implied in this invaluable privilege we shall proceed to consider in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

ADOPTION.

THE testimony of the Spirit is given to this fact, that we are become *the sons of God*, by adoption into his family. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." This phrase is used in Holy Scripture with a diversity of application. A relationship to God, expressed by the term "Son," has been borne by beings in very different circumstances. Jesus Christ, for instance, is denominated the Son of God in a peculiar sense. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;" on which the brief and beautiful comment of Mr. Wesley is, "God of God—Light of light—I have begotten thee from eternity, which, by its unalterable permanency of duration, is one continued unsuccessive day."

Angels are also denominated "sons of God." In a sublime passage of the Book of Job, which describes the laying of the earth's foundations, the morning stars are said to have "sung together, and the sons of God shouted for joy." These holy beings, deriving as they did their entire existence immediately from God, are called his sons; but still, in a sense widely different

from that in which Jesus Christ is so denominated. "He hath, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than they." For unto which of the angels said the Eternal Father, "at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?"

In a sense not materially different from that in which angels receive this title, it is also given to Adam. In tracing up the genealogy of our Lord and Saviour, St. Luke concludes the series thus: "Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God." It is probably in reference to the immediate act of creation, in which Adam received at once his entire being from the hand of his Creator, that he is thus specially denominated "the son of God."

But it is in a sense very different from that in which the phrase is used in either of the above instances that believers are denominated the sons of God. They are so, not by generation, not by an immediate act of creation, but by adoption. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Adoption is a gracious act of God the Father, whereby for the sake of the atonement made by Christ on the cross, and in consideration of faith on the part of his creatures in that atonement, he receives into his family, and admits to all the

privileges of his house, those who trust in the death of his Son. And the witness of the Spirit is the testimony of God, that this solemn act has taken place. Let it be here observed, that justification and adoption, although in their formal character they are not precisely the same thing—for they may be distinguished—yet are never separated nor disunited. Whom God justifies he also adopts. If he pardons the sinner, he also receives him into his family. Yet the distinction between these two inseparable blessings is plainly enough to be perceived. An earthly sovereign sometimes pardons a criminal, but seldom or never adopts him into his family. He dismisses him from his presence; and, not unfrequently, under a severe prohibition never to approach his court again.

But very different is the grace showed to pardoned sinners. It is more ample and complete; and, indeed, every way worthy of the great Jehovah. He is so gracious and condescending as to unite two inestimable favors in one;—the forgiveness of the past, and sonship for the future. He pardons the transgressions of the repentant sinner, upon his believing in the atoning death of Christ; blotting out immense, and long-continued, and most aggravated offenses. And herein is love. It is an act of

unspeakable grace and condescension. But, at the next step, even this grace is surpassed, and left far behind. He says to the offender, to whom he has just forgiven offenses of unparalleled magnitude, "Come to my paternal arms,—come into my house,—come and partake of all the privileges of my family."

1. Adoption then supposes, first, *a change of our relation to God.* It supposes our being brought out of a previous state of alienation, and distance, and opposition, to become, by incorporation, members of the family of God.

The usage or ceremony of adoption was of frequent occurrence among the Greeks and Romans, at the time when the apostle wrote; and his language would, therefore, be immediately comprehended. As we have not, among our laws, any prescribed form for the transferring of a child to another family, it is perhaps not so easy for us as it was for those who first received the epistle, to take in the precise idea of the apostle. The laws of ancient Rome, regulating this ceremony, were exactly prescribed; and the ceremony itself was doubtless of frequent occurrence. There could, therefore, to the first readers of this epistle, be no difficulty in apprehending St. Paul's meaning.

The child was taken from the house of its

parent, and introduced, with the accustomed formalities, into the house of the benevolent individual who adopted it. That benevolent individual, in the act of adopting the child, engaged to act toward it as a father. He engaged to watch over its welfare,—to provide for its wants,—to be in all respects *in loco parentis*,—to stand in the place of its natural parent. He took the charge of the education and training of the helpless being now cast upon his care. That training was to be in reference to its future prospects; and it was at least supposed and understood, that the child so adopted should be admitted to share the inheritance of his adopting father; as much so as if he had been born in the house.

When these circumstances are considered, it immediately appears that the term "adoption," which implies all this, is very full of instruction. Previously to this act of God's grace, by which he received and adopted us, we stood in a very different relation to him. We were strangers and aliens; strangers to the covenant of his promise,—aliens from the commonwealth of his Israel. We knew him not as our Father in heaven. More than this, we were *disobedient*, —living in the continual disregard of his laws, and the contempt of his authority. The whole

course of our lives was in opposition to his will and his published requirements. Still further, all this gave us no concern. We grieved not over this our lapsed, disordered, and perilous condition. Our will even concurred in it. It was become habitual and natural. We were "enemies in our minds by wicked works." Strangers, disobedient, and enemies! Thus his grace finds us. How great the change, when, by adoption, we become his loving and obedient children!

It is to be understood that there are certain conditions to this act of God's mercy, preliminary to its bestowment. It is to be understood that, by repentance, he has turned us from our disobedience, and that moreover we have submitted to be saved in his own appointed method, through faith in his dear Son. It is immediately conditional to our passing into the family of God, that we receive Christ into our hearts by faith. Then is fulfilled that scripture, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." John i, 12. The Father of their spirits pardons all their sins past, takes them for his own, treats them as though they had never been otherwise than his children, as

though they had never been either enemies or even strangers. He calls them (that is, actually constitutes them) his sons and daughters. Having adopted them, he engages to act toward them as a parent. He watches over them with parental care; guides their steps; averts evil from them; and provides for them all which his infinite wisdom sees to be for their good. It is part of his merciful purpose, also, to educate them with a reference to that eternal inheritance which is in reversion for them. And in this light—as a training for eternity—must we view that diversified scene of trial to which they are here exposed. Prosperity and adversity, pain and ease, joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears—all are instruments of edification in His hands, who is training many sons for a glorious immortality.

2. Adoption, we may further observe, in addition to a new relation in which we now stand to God, implies a change and enlargement of our privileges. Having constituted us his sons by adoption, he now admits us to the possession of all the blessings and advantages of sonship. An enemy or a stranger (and such we were) is entirely destitute of privileges. A servant has some few, and those of an inferior order. But

a son has many privileges which are peculiar to his state and relation. "Thou art," says the apostle, "no more a servant, but a son."

A child-like confidence is immediately substituted for anxiety and alarm. The shy distrust mingled with fear, which an enemy, or a stranger, or even a servant might feel, is all removed; and in the place of it, there exists toward God a filial disposition, that is, the disposition of a son toward a father. This becomes now the habitual feeling of the soul, in reference to the greatest and best of beings. There is no more the shrinking of guilt. There is no more the distrust which is the offspring of a conscious exposure to wrath. In prayer, and in all the exercises of devotion, the soul draws near to God. He permits,—nay more, he enjoins,—that in all our addresses to him, we should use freedom and confidence, mingled with humility. "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."

There is *liberty* from the galling servitude of sin. There is liberty from the thraldom of doing God's service with the fear of the rod hanging over our heads. There is liberty to walk free from all successful obstruction, and to keep God's commandments. "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke

of bondage." Gal. v, 1. For where the attesting Spirit of the Lord is, "there is liberty."

Further: among the privileges of the adopted children of God, perfect *safety* is implied. If we have been accepted and received into the family of the great Jehovah, then are we under his protection—then are we safe—all our interests are safe. His paternal ear is ever ready to hear our requests;—his paternal arms are ever ready to be stretched out for our rescue when danger is near. His fatherly counsel will be administered in the time of doubt and perplexity;—and a care, more peculiar and special even than that which is "over all his works," will be exercised over our welfare.

In short, if permission to approach the King of kings as frequently as our wants may require,—if freedom in addressing him,—if an assurance of his care, and love, and providence over us, are privileges which ought to be prized, then are the adopted children of God highly favored; for to their possession of these privileges does the Spirit of adoption give his testimony.

3. We have seen that a change of relation, accompanied with an increase of privileges, is experienced by all the children of God. But this is not all. More of blessing is included in this happy state into which believers are intro-

duced. It implies *an entire change of prospect;* unfolds bright hopes of still better things to come, and opens glorious visions of future and interminable happiness.

Let it be observed, however, that it is not—this testimony of the Spirit is not—an assurance given to believers of their final perseverance in the good ways of God; nor is it the impartation of certain knowledge that they shall infallibly attain the happiness of heaven. It is not, indeed, a testimony as to the *future* in any sense, but as to the *present.* It relates altogether to the present condition of happy relationship toward God *in which they now stand.* It is expressed by those words of another apostle,—"Beloved, now are we the sons of God."

Nevertheless, although the Spirit of adoption is simply a testimony given as to a state of things now present, it is impossible but that such a blessing should have a material influence upon the future prospects of those to whom it is given. A title to the unfading glories of heaven is implied in it; for "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Rom. viii, 17. It must, therefore, of necessity, change all their views of the future. Heretofore, their anticipations were all bounded by time. There

was nothing beyond it which was pleasant to contemplate. But now the case is far otherwise with them. A crown is before them,—a kingdom in the heavens which shall not pass away. They are already kings as well as priests unto God. How all their views are changed! What they viewed as great and dignified before has lost all its attractions. The loftiest of this world's glories is brought low, and all its brightest splendors are obscured. But their faith brings the distant nigh, and reveals the invisible; and, while this changes their former views of things, it must also influence and elevate their characters. So far as their evidence of sonship to God is bright and clear, it will raise them above everything that is little, and low, and earthly. They will act, and speak, and think as the children of an Almighty King, and the dignity of heaven will be impressed upon all they do.

Their views of the glory which awaits them must needs soothe their sorrows while they remain in this present state of banishment. If they are poor, oppressed, or despised, they perceive that their Saviour was so before them; and they see him now raised to a celestial throne, and promising them that, in due time, they shall

share it. O! if we have heaven before us, we may well dry up the tears shed for any sublunary cause of sorrow!

> "Why should the children of a King
> Go mourning all their days?"

Upon the whole, the blessedness of a state of adoption must be allowed to be very great. What a mercy is this that we should be called, that is, constituted, the children and heirs of the divine Majesty! How great is the love that makes us so! What manner of love is this, says St. John, that we should be called the sons of God!—*we*, who were so unlikely and so unworthy to obtain this sublime designation. Slaves we were, and we are made free;—polluted, and we are made clean;—guilty, and we are pardoned. For He hath blotted out our sins as a cloud passes away before the sun.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us!" And love of the most extraordinary character, unexampled in its source, in its objects, in its degree; a theme of everlasting praise and of everlasting wonder. How can it be, thou Lord of heaven and earth, that from among a race of guilty and alienated rebels thou shouldst adopt thy sons, and make slaves the partners of thy throne? Yet so it is. This is

the matter of the testimony. This is the very thing to which, as we are about to show, a divine testimony is given; namely, "that we are the children of God."

CHAPTER III.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT CONSIDERED IN THE DIRECT CHARACTER OF IT.

ADOPTION, according to the view taken of it in the previous chapter, is a gracious act of God, by which an important change is produced in our relation to him, our heavenly Father. The change being, however, a relative one, and referring to the kind and loving disposition felt at present toward us by our heavenly Parent, must, if we are to know it, be made known to us by himself. The knowledge of what passes in the divine mind must, if it be known at all, be divinely revealed. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." It will scarcely be alledged that it is of small importance to the Christian life whether this, our adoption into the divine family, be made known to us or not. We assume for the present, and shall hereafter endeavor to

demonstrate at large, that the knowledge of our heavenly Father's adopting love to us enters into all that is most vital in religious experience. It may be sufficient here to appeal to all who have read the New Testament carefully, whether it is not evident that believers, during the first age of Christianity, rejoiced in a satisfactory assurance of their being in the divine favor. This was their language:—"Beloved, now are we the sons of God. . . . God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. . . . We have received the atonement. . . . The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. . . . We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice. . . . By whom also we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

It is impossible to read these passages (and numberless others of a similar purport might be adduced) without perceiving that, whatever may be the case with respect to religious experience now, it was, in those early times, of a peculiarly joyous character. Believers evidently walked in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Happy in the conscious favor of God in this world, they looked forward with a blessed hope of dwelling

in his presence everlastingly. Nor ought it to be otherwise with believers at present. Is it for a moment to be supposed that Christian privilege has diminished with the lapse of time?—that a change has taken place of which no intimation is anywhere given in Scripture?—that, in a word, Christians are not to be *now* what they evidently were *then?* In all respects, excepting the miraculous gifts of the early church, (and it is with some hesitation that we look even upon those as forming any exception,) we apprehend the intention of Almighty God to be, that his people now should be equally adorned with beauty, and filled with glorious happiness, as in the primitive days.

It is surely to do injustice to Christianity to suppose that, like the previous dispensations, it is to shine with diminished brightness as ages roll on, as though it hastened to decay, and was about to disappear. On the contrary, the more correct view appears to be, that, instead of losing any of its power to bless, and save, and make happy, Christ's religion is, in all these respects, to shine with a continually augmenting splendor until it is finally swallowed up in the glory of the celestial economy, and lost in the approaching brightness of heaven.

Most desirable and valuable, as all must per-

ceive and allow, is the privilege of knowing, with a comfortable assurance, that we are adopted into the family of God. And the point of inquiry to which we would now direct the reader's attention is this,—By what means, and in what method, is this "knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins" (Luke i, 77) to be obtained? Whence is that knowledge (surely surpassing all earthly science) to be derived? and to what sources of evidence is the inquiring mind to be directed?

Let it be here observed—that the question now is, not what this or the other divine has taught, for we have ventured to suggest an opinion, that there has been great confusion of thought, and obscurity of view, among some of the most celebrated divines, on this interesting subject. But our appeal is now to the Scriptures. And we wish to inquire,—What is the method taught by Holy Scripture, in which a believer is to ascertain his relation of sonship to God? It may be as well here to allow, at once, that our view of the directions of Scripture in reference to this important privilege may be deemed peculiar, when contrasted with those very generally propounded at the present day. We perceive in the word of God, that one plain designation of the Holy Ghost is that of "*the*

Spirit of adoption." In this mode of expression, we conceive it to be implied, that the knowledge of our adoption is, in the first instance, communicated by Him alone,—that it is his specific work,—that it is an office of the Holy Ghost, as clearly defined as any other attributed to him; as when, for instance, he is called the *Teacher*, or *Sanctifier*, or *Guide* of God's people,—and that, in a word, the knowledge of our acceptance with God is in no other way to be obtained by us, except through his divine testimony.

We are aware, that the most common mode of adverting to this privilege of believers, is somewhat like the following:—"The Spirit bears witness (it is said) to our adoption, in the Scriptures;—it is the Spirit in the word, or the Spirit through the medium of the word." When we hesitate to receive this interpretation, and press for a little more light as to its exact meaning, we find that the views of those who receive it may thus be defined:—The Spirit of God, who inspired the sacred penmen, has laid down in the Bible certain marks of the children of God. By these marks we are to examine ourselves, and if they are found in us, we are authorized to draw the conclusion that we have been adopted into the divine family. And further,

when the inference is favorable, we may be said to have received the Spirit of adoption, and to have the testimony of the Spirit to our sonship.

Such an interpretation of the Scriptural mode of speaking, however, will hardly be thought quite satisfactory by those who candidly consider Saint Paul's mode of expressing himself, both in the Epistle to the Romans, viii, 16, and in that to the Galatians, iv, 6. In the former he says, "The *Spirit itself* beareth witness with our spirit;"—a peculiar mode of expression, and one which will by no means agree with the notion that all the testimony of the Spirit is comprised in what he has spoken in the Scripture. If I say, "A man himself testified to me," I surely mean by this something more than that he has written various things, from which, when viewed in conjunction and carefully considered, *I infer* that such is his mind. Besides, those who say that the Spirit testifies *in the Scriptures*, should observe that not only does the apostle himself not assert this, but he asserts what will render that interpretation impracticable. He tells us, with sufficient plainness, *where* the Holy Ghost bears his testimony. It is *in* our spirit,—it is *to* our spirit,—it is *with* our spirit. His mode of speaking apparently

includes all these; (*συμμαρτυρει τῳ πνευματι ημων,*) and no interpretation which excludes either of those ideas can be said to express the full force of the apostolic language. The testimony is directly given in the first instance,—the evidence is communicated by the Spirit of God to the spirit of man. It is given *in the interior sanctuary of the heart*, by that mysterious process of communication by which the Holy Spirit can make known his will, and cause his voice to be heard. It is subsequently confirmed and perfected by the testimony of our own spirit. For the blessing which we denominate "the witness of the Spirit," in its ordinary enjoyment by believers, consists, according to our view, of the *concurrent testimony of the Spirit of God* WITH *ours.*

Without calling in question, therefore, the propriety of self-examination by those Scriptural marks of sonship referred to, (a duty which, as we shall presently show, has its proper place and importance,) we would appeal to any candid mind, whether the passages we are now considering (Rom. viii, 16; Gal. iv, 6) can be supposed to refer to a lengthened process of examination and inference;—whether, in short, something more direct and immediate must not necessarily be intended. "The Spirit itself

beareth witness with our spirit," must surely mean something more than—The Spirit hath described in Scripture certain marks of the children of God.

To this doctrine, that the witness of the Spirit is only by a conformity to the marks of God's children laid down in Scripture, we have two principal objections. In the first place,—It is beginning at the wrong end; and, in addition, the evidence derived from it must necessarily be defective, and must fail of producing a satisfactory persuasion.

It is, in the first instance, a reversing the proper order of proceeding, to expect those marks of sonship,—marks which are chiefly, if not entirely, the results of manifested adoption, —*before* any knowledge of adoption itself has been apprehended. They will follow *after*. They will be the *fruits* of the Spirit, and will confirm the belief of the presence of the Spirit of adoption in the heart. But were not that Spirit previously there, and were not his testimony to our acceptance with God freely and graciously given, those signs of sonship could not exist. For the marks most to be relied on are, love to a pardoning God,—delight in God, —peace with God,—joy in God,—submission to God. All these must *spring out of* his mani-

fested love to us. But to expect them as the first step, without the previous revelation of Christ in the heart by the Holy Ghost, is very much like the expectation of fruit, while the tree itself is not yet planted. Admitting, therefore, as we willingly do, that there are certain *criteria*, from which a probable inference as to our adoption may be drawn, we are persuaded that those criteria themselves cannot exist, without the previous manifestation of God's love to us; and that to expect them apart from this, as signs going before to establish the knowledge of it, is indeed to reverse the established Scriptural order. It is to begin at the wrong end.

But, in addition, that inference thus attempted to be drawn will not be satisfactory, nor conclusive. We very much doubt, if ever there was an instance of any man arriving at such an assurance of God's favor as excluded painful fear and doubt, if he merely sought evidence on that point by examining whether the marks of God's children were in him. As we are speaking to a matter of fact, we would speak with all becoming diffidence. But such is the result of all our observations. We have always found such persons full of doubts and fears, on a point of vital importance to their own religious comfort. This might reasonably be expected, if

they are seeking the blessing of assurance (as, according to our views, they are) in a mistaken method. They are beginning where they ought to end. They are looking for fruits which only the Spirit of adoption himself can produce. But this office of the Holy Spirit, to witness the believer's adoption, they set aside and deny. In consequence, the fruits of the Spirit are not found in them; or, at most, the peace, the joy, the love, the victory over the world, and the other evidences of a change of relation toward God, are miserably defective, both in character and degree. They are but shadowy and faint outlines of those graces which must really exist, and exist in some degree of perfection, before they can afford any satisfactory evidence on a point like this.

Here, indeed, is the chief difficulty;—in the impossibility of knowing in what measure and degree these graces must exist, in order to constitute a sufficient evidence of a change of state. And if, therefore, we will not admit of any other evidence but that derived from the *fruits* of the Spirit, we shall be in perpetual uncertainty. We cannot, for instance, from any consciousness of our faith, infer our justification. We know, indeed, that "he that believeth is justified from all things." But, surely, it is not

every degree of faith, nor every kind of faith, to which the promise is made. So that, if we leave out of our creed the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, we shall still remain in doubt and uncertainty. For who is to assure us that our faith is of the right kind, and that it is exercised in that degree which the gospel requires? It is again admitted that love to God, obedience to the commands of God, delight in God, and love to the people of God, are marks of his children. But here again it may be observed, that it is not any inferior degree of these graces from which it will be safe to draw a favorable inference as to our state. As they may exist in all possible degrees, at what point, it may be asked, and in what degree of their possession, do they begin to be evidences of a change of relation to God? Can this point be ascertained satisfactorily, without having recourse to a direct communication from the eternal Spirit? It will be impossible to judge accurately of the value of these signs of acceptance, unless, as the apostle says, we "receive the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor. ii, 12. Admitting, as we do, that our justification and adoption are inseparably attached to the performance of certain conditions

on our part, it still appears plain that we should need a direct communication from the Holy Spirit of God, to assure us that we had adequately performed those conditions, before we could in this way (even were that the Scriptural way) safely infer our filial relation to God.

We may here appeal to facts. Does not the penitent seeker of salvation find it to be an utter impossibility to ground his confidence of being now accepted on anything that has been even divinely *wrought in* him? He can see nothing but sin. He has nothing but a sense of utter worthlessness. The more deeply penitent he is, the more does he write bitter things against himself. You tell him, as the evidence of his acceptance, to look at the graces which the Spirit has wrought in him. Alas! his eyes are dimmed with tears. He cannot see them. He sees defect and sin marking all his actions. Nothing but an evidence external to anything that is in himself can clear up his doubts, and remove his alarms. No reasoning—no inference can decide the point. The very depth and genuineness of his repentance render a favorable conclusion in reference to his own state impossible. A kind of evidence, therefore, totally different from the reasonings of his own spirit, becomes absolutely necessary; for, those rea-

sonings, just in proportion as he is humble and penitent, will be confused and dark, and will lean toward a conclusion of an unfavorable character.

But here, according to our view, comes in the only relief of this state of painful doubt and uncertainty. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of adoption, removes this distressing fear and alarm which is felt by every sincere penitent. Upon his believing in the atonement made by the Son of God, so as to trust alone in it for justification,—indeed in the very moment of his so believing,—"the Spirit itself" affords the delightful, heartfelt testimony, that "his faith is counted unto him for righteousness,"—that the gracious act of his free justification from all the guilt of his past sins has taken place, and that he is now taken into a filial relation to his heavenly Father.

Some of the passages of Holy Scripture, from which we gather this important doctrine, we have already quoted. But let us here review them in their combined force, and as throwing light upon each other. The foundation of the whole is laid here:—"As many as received him, to them gave he power" [*εξουσιαν*, the privilege] "to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;—which were born,

not .... of man, but of God." Adoption is, therefore, the inseparable attendant of a reception of Christ, and of faith in his name. Then, as to the *privilege* belonging to this state, we consult other portions of holy writ, and we find it thus described:—"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father," .... "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption." "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

In reference to the two passages last quoted, it may be advisable for the reader, in order to convince himself that the apostle does really speak of the Holy Spirit of God personally, to examine carefully all the former part of the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. He will then see sufficient proof, that the Spirit of whom St. Paul treats, is not *the Spirit in the word*, as some would explain it, but the Spirit in his immediate and direct operations on the human mind. He is called, within the compass of a few verses, "The Spirit of God .... The Spirit of Christ .... The Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead." He is represented as "dwelling in believers," as enabling them to mortify the deeds of the body, as leading and guiding the sons of God. Then,

in immediate connection with these sayings, (all of which plainly refer to the immediate operation of the Spirit on the mind,) there occur the statements concerning the testimony he gives to the believer's adoption. Now, if in all the former part of the chapter, wherever the Spirit of God is mentioned, he is represented, by his personal and powerful operations, as leading, guiding, strengthening, and quickening believers, not by the medium of the word, but by his own immediate influence; it seems most natural to interpret the 15th and 16th verses in the same way, and to understand the testimony there mentioned as given by the immediate influence of the Spirit on the minds of believers. If, in almost every previous verse of the chapter, we are prepared to allow that the Spirit is spoken of personally, as operating directly on the human mind; consistency seems to require that we should thus interpret the apostle through the whole of his sublime account of the Spirit's work and offices. In doing this, we are far from undervaluing the importance (as we shall presently show) of a reference to the written word, in the matter of obtaining evidence of our sonship. We only wish it to be understood that, in the order of time, this self-examination, with the word of God in our hands, must be a sub-

sequent and secondary duty. In the nature of things, the Spirit's direct testimony must precede the evidence derived from "the fruit of the Spirit."

We have further to remark, that the Scriptures, in speaking of the assurance of salvation given to believers, do not confine themselves to this phraseology of the *Spirit witnessing*. They speak of the Spirit as *sealing* believers; a phrase which, taken in conjunction with the context, in the several instances where it occurs, will appear to signify the same thing as the testimony of the Spirit, on which we have already dwelt. "That we," says the apostle, (Ephes. i, 13,) "should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise." The same mode of speaking occurs 2 Cor. i, 21, 22: "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also *sealed* us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." It occurs again Ephes. iv, 30: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption."

Now, can any one imagine that these be-

lievers, sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, were destitute of a comfortable assurance of their acceptance with God? The stamp of heaven was upon them. The impression, too, was directly made by the Holy Spirit. It was made when they believed—when they trusted in Christ. It was made immediately upon their believing; and not, as might by some be erroneously inferred, after the lapse of some considerable time. The original Greek, of the passage in Ephesians, i, 13, is much more definite and clear than the translation:—*πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε, having believed, ye were sealed.* In the order of thought, indeed, and in the order of occurrence, it was "*after* they believed;" but this does not necessarily imply the lapse of any ascertainable portion of time, between the act of believing and the privilege of being sealed. Believers, thus sealed, must be understood to be the ascertained property of God; for this is the idea conveyed by the affixing of a seal. He has received them, he claims them, he gives this attestation to the fact that they are his. It cannot, either to themselves or to any considerate observer, be any longer doubtful, among what description of persons they are to be classed, nor to whom they belong.

Still more to confirm this view of the gospel privilege of assurance, there is another term employed by the sacred writers, in conjunction with the sealing of the Spirit. It is that of "the *earnest* of the Spirit" given to believers in their hearts. "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing, is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit; therefore we are always confident." 2 Cor. v, 5. "That Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." Eph. i, 14. The same idea is also conveyed by a phrase of St. Paul's, (Rom. viii, 23,) "Ourselves .... which have the first-fruits of the Spirit."

The distinction between the two last mentioned modes of presenting the believer's privilege in the New Testament is correctly drawn by Cruden, in his Concordance, (*sub voce* EARNEST,) "*Seal* and *earnest*, though they both imply assurance, yet they differ thus:—Sealing especially refers to the *understanding;* earnest to the *affections*. Though the seal assures us, yet it is not part of the inheritance. But the earnest so assures us, that it gives part of the inheritance. It works that joy in the heart which is a foretaste of heaven, and which the saints are filled with there."

It is worthy of remark, that the word *arrabon*, rendered "earnest," is originally Hebrew [ערבון] and has passed into the Greek and Latin languages, [*αρραβων* arrhabon,] and in all of them retains the same meaning.* It signifies a pledge given, binding the party who gives it to fulfill conditions involving other and more valuable gifts, upon the production of the pledge at some future day. It refers, therefore, both to the present and the future. It denotes a present relation, into which the person is taken who receives the earnest. He is taken into the divine family, into such a state that, if he continue therein, he shall be everlastingly saved. The earnest, therefore, decides the *present*, absolutely and positively. It is a pledge of present favor: and it decides the *future* conditionally;—no change being to be apprehended (for none is possible) in God; and the only condition being that the pledge or earnest has been retained, and can be produced. The Greek writers used the term to signify the token of the pledged faith of those who were espoused, [*ὁ τῶν γαμῶν ἀρράβων, the pledge of marriage,*] and this may

* Its exact meaning seems well defined by Parkhurst, "A *pledge* or *earnest*, which stands for part of the price, and is paid beforehand to confirm the bargain."

show us that they considered it as implying both a seal of the present, and a pledge of the future. Now the Holy Spirit, given to believers, is both a seal of present favor, and a pledge of future blessings; and great indeed is the blessedness of those who are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

There are other passages of Scripture, almost without number, in which, though less directly, the subject of the happy state of true believers in Christ, with respect to their present filial relation to God, is adverted to. Perhaps these incidental allusions may, to some minds, appear of equal, if not superior force to those which we have adduced as treating on this subject more directly.

Believers, for example, "rejoice in hope." But this must, of course, suppose that they perceive the clearness of their title to the joys of the celestial kingdom, and have a comfortable persuasion of their individual interest in it.

Believers, as described in the New Testament, have "the love of God shed abroad in their hearts," which, according to the intimations of Scripture, could not, we apprehend, be the case without a revelation of God's pardoning love to them: "We love him because he first loved us."

Believers, after the model of the New Testament, "know that the Son of God is come," and that they "are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John v, 20; a mode of speaking which does not admit of our supposing that any doubt could remain on their minds, as to their interest in his redeeming work.

Again,—their bodies are the temples of Deity. This is a truth of which they are supposed to be fully apprised: "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God?" 1 Cor. vi, 19. If, then, a true believer be in all cases a temple of the Holy Ghost, which blessed Spirit dwells in him; how can it be otherwise than that he should fill the temple in which he dwells with glorious light? Where God dwells and manifests his presence, the believer must surely walk in the light of his countenance.

Further,—believers are uniformly spoken of as *knowing* that they "have in heaven a better and enduring substance." Heb. x, 34. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God,"—"we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." No shadow of doubt or uncertainty appears to have rested upon the minds of those first believers. They walked in the light; and what was Christian privilege *then*, must be sup-

posed to be Christian privilege *now*. Yet more: "The love of Christ constrained them," exerted a sweet, powerful, resistless influence over them, as the word *συνέχει*, *constraineth*, seems to imply. Now it is difficult to comprehend how this effect could be produced upon the first followers of the Redeemer, unless they had a clear perception of his love to them on the one hand, and unless that love, made known to them by the revealing Spirit, had called forth a reciprocal affection on their part toward him.

To sum up the whole;—from the incidental notices of the experience of believers contained in the New Testament, it may safely be concluded, that their experience of religion was of a truly happy character. Unto them, unto all that believed, Christ was precious. Their joy in him, though now they saw him not, was unspeakable and full of glory. They stood fast in the liberty with which Christ had made them free. They had received the atonement. They looked with joy to the promised coming of the Saviour, and they looked for everlasting life with him in heaven. Let us not suppose that anything short of this can be deemed to be the genuine experience of the sons of God. At any point below this we must not stop, if we wish to be either safe or happy. A religion which ban-

ishes painful fear is what we need, and that to which we should aspire. Our gracious God would certainly not have us to remain in doubt as to his love toward us, nor languid and cold in our love to him. This filial confidence toward God, which the world calls and always has called enthusiasm, but which is the spring and source of all that is vital in religion, can be wrought in the soul only by the inward revelation of the Spirit of God. For this testimony of the Spirit let us look with earnest desire; and plead for it in the exercise of faith in the promises, until we can say with one whose conversion was very clearly marked, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me." Gal. i, 15, 16.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT, AS TO THE MODE IN WHICH IT IS GIVEN.

At this point, it is not very unnatural that the question should present itself,—How, and in what manner, and with what attendant circumstances, is the attestation of the Spirit to a believer's sonship usually given? This will probably be found to be the most difficult part of

our task to accomplish satisfactorily; but it is necessary that we should attempt it, if for no other reason, yet for this, that we may clear away all ground for imputing enthusiastic delusions to those who conscientiously hold this Scriptural doctrine.

It has been frequently noticed, that some of the most vital and necessary truths of the Scripture lie near to the perilous brink of error; and, if the guards adequately provided for the purpose of safety be neglected, may easily be perverted to fatal consequences. The doctrine, for instance, of justification by faith, has been pushed to the extreme of making void the moral law,—although, if taught scripturally, there is not the least tendency in the doctrine itself to lead to this result. We do not deny that, in like manner, the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit may, without care, be perverted to the introducing of real enthusiasm; although, when taught with the Scriptural guards which we shall adduce, there can be no danger of this fatal mistake.

Let no one, however, suppose that words are competent to describe adequately the mode of the divine operation on the soul of man. The Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures has not thought fit to enter into any formal description

of the method in which he produces the joyous persuasion in the minds of believers, that they are adopted into the family of God. Our account of this gracious act of infinite mercy will, therefore, be partly of a negative character, and partly it will be derived, by way of inference, from what is plainly, though incidentally, taught in various parts of the New Testament.

First,—This testimony is not given by a voice from heaven. Herein it differs from those intimations which the Scriptures assure us were given at various times to holy men and inspired prophets. It has nothing miraculous about it. Miracles were commonly intended to arrest and fix the attention of a careless and indifferent world upon something in the divine working which it was important that mankind should carefully observe. Our Lord's divine sonship, for instance, was thus attested by a voice from heaven. Among the many who came to John to be baptized at the river Jordan, was Jesus the Messiah; and John hesitated, as well he might, whether it would be seemly for him, a mere mortal, to apply the water of baptism to the sacred person of the incarnate Deity. His scruples being, however, overcome, he consented to baptize him; but on his ascending from the water, John saw the Spirit of God descend-

ing like a dove and lighting upon him; and a voice from heaven was heard, saying, This is my beloved Son.

If God had seen meet to attest the sonship of his adopted children in the same manner as he gave witness to that of his own and beloved Son, he could doubtless have done so. But he is a being of infinite reason, and does nothing needlessly. In the case of Christ, it was important that the attestation should be given in this public manner, that all around might hear, and that all might believe. That voice came not for his sake, but for theirs to whom it was important that sufficient evidence of the Messiahship should be given. For the Saviour himself it was not necessary. No such public attestation is necessary in the case of believers, and none such do we anticipate.

2. Neither, in point of fact, is this communication made to the soul by any voice at all addressed to the senses; although doubtless it may sometimes be so vividly communicated, as to render it difficult to discern between the voice of the Spirit addressed to the spiritual sense of hearing, (if this figurative language may be allowed,) and the utterance of the same things to the outward ear.

If believers have sometimes spoken of *hear-*

ing the voice of God, and of having the promises of the gospel *spoken* to them, it must not be forgotten that the Scripture also speaks of the Spirit making intercession in the saints—of the Spirit crying in their hearts, Abba, Father. We must not indiscriminately condemn all such figurative language as improper, while, at the same time, it is important to distinguish between what is figurative and what is literal. And further; if instances should occur, where even what is inwardly revealed by the Spirit is mistaken, on account of its vividness and force, for a communication made to the outward senses, we must again recollect that similar instances appear to have occurred, as recorded in the Bible.

When the Saviour addressed to the woman of Samaria, at Jacob's well, a few words in reference to one part of her sinful conduct, the Spirit of God appears to have spoken abundantly more to her conscience, and that in so powerful a manner that she imagined these internal admonitions to have been addressed to her sense of hearing: "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did." Nor is it at all unusual, we believe, for the mind, in certain conditions of deep and intense feeling, to find it difficult to distinguish between what is power-

fully impressed by the divine Spirit on the heart, and what is actually addressed to the outward ear. But still, we wish it to be clearly understood that the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit by no means includes any enthusiastic expectation of voices audibly addressed to the believer, nor the occurrence of anything that is, properly speaking, miraculous.

3. Neither do we speak of a testimony communicated by a supernatural vision. All, therefore, which has been spoken at various times by zealous opponents against the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, on the ground that we rely too much on visions and voices, is quite wide of the mark. For we lay no stress on visions nor voices at all; and encourage no expectation of them. They would add nothing to the evidence, even supposing they were given. The witness of the Spirit is something entirely distinct from them, and of a different nature.

That all accounts of appearances which are supernatural—or that cannot be accounted for on any known principles and laws—should be received with caution, is a sound dictate of Christian prudence. But, we are not going to lay it down as a principle, that all such accounts are at once to be rejected as incredible. There are more and stranger things in the world than

are dreamed of in the world's shallow and short-sighted philosophy. There have been, as we must take the liberty of believing, instances of what may be termed a divine and supernatural vision. Few will deny this who have read, with any candor, the Life of Colonel Gardiner, written by Doctor Doddridge. The colonel was not an enthusiast, nor a visionary. He was a man of strong and commanding intellect; sober in his views, and of a deep and rational piety. But that life of piety, which was uniform and without a stain, dates its commencement from a remarkable manifestation made, as far as he could judge, to his senses, of the Saviour on the cross.

The result was, that a gay, trifling votary of worldly pleasure, became a pious and devoted follower of the Saviour. All the current of his life was entirely changed. The fruits produced by this mysterious appearance were holy and excellent; and if anything of this extraordinary character may be judged of it by its results, then was this not from nature, not from beneath, but from above.

We would not say but that the favor of God may have been manifested, in some rare instances, with attendant circumstances not very dissimilar to those which we have adverted to

as occurring in the case of Colonel Gardiner. But we wish it to be understood, that even in those instances, no one who is wise will lay any stress on what was visionary in the communication, or look upon it in any other light than as a circumstance altogether extraneous to the great point to be decided. It is not itself the witness of the Spirit. It is, properly speaking, no part of the evidence; and neither adds to, nor detracts from, its credibility. Should the witness of the Spirit, therefore, be thus given, it would not be the visionary representation accompanying it which would give it any part of its value. It would not be either the more or the less certain—it would not claim either more or less of confidence for being so accompanied.

We thus wish to avoid, in treating on this interesting subject, all modes of speaking, against which there may be any reasonable objection. In addition, we would lay aside, for the present, all figurative language, and neither speak of the divine testimony as a voice, nor as an impression, nor as an inspiration; although, on ordinary occasions, each of these modes of speech may be allowable. But, in the plainest and most literal terms, we would define the witness of the Spirit to be

"A SATISFACTORY AND JOYFUL PERSUASION, PRODUCED BY THE HOLY GHOST IN THE MIND OF A BELIEVER, THAT HE IS NOW A CHILD OF GOD."

This definition is from the pen of the late Rev. E. Grindrod,* and it would be difficult, perhaps, to find a better. In reference to it, we may remark the following particulars:—

1. It assumes, of course, that this "persuasion" is produced by the *direct* and *immediate* operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind of a believer. It speaks of the influence of spirit on spirit, and recognizes no media through which the intelligence is conveyed. The persuasion itself has reference to a fact of which the Spirit of God alone, who searcheth all things, can be cognizant. It is, that the Eternal Father has adopted us, and made us his children, in the exercise of his abundant grace, through the atonement of his Son. And now, the Holy Ghost, in his office of the Spirit of adoption, attests this to us, that we may know—distinctly and clearly know—the things which are freely given to us of God.

2. The definition which we have given is correct, if it be understood to describe the witness

* Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, January, 1825.

of the Spirit, as it takes place immediately upon a sinner's free justification. But it is less correct, if it be taken as an account of the habitual enjoyment of this blessing by believers in their subsequent walk. In the first instance, it must, of course, be the witness of the Spirit *to* our spirits. But subsequently, in the habitual experience of the believer, it is more correctly expressed in the language of St. Paul, as the witness of the Spirit *with* our spirit. It then becomes the joint and concurrent testimony of the Spirit of God *with ours*.

This distinction, which we take to be of very great importance, has not, perhaps, been sufficiently attended to. We shall have occasion, in a subsequent chapter, to enter on the elucidation of it more at large. For the present, it may suffice to say, that the Scripture plainly recognizes the witness of our own spirit, as well as the witness of the Spirit of God. The former and the latter are conjoined in the completeness and plenitude of this blessing, as believers are represented to live and walk in the enjoyment of it. But, in its first communication it is quite distinct and apart from any evidence of our own spirit, which to that moment has been destitute of all the marks of the sons of God, and has, therefore, no evidence to give. The whole of

the evidence is, therefore, in the first instance, ascribed to the Spirit of God.

3. Still, it may be said, this definition does not reach the point desired. It does not explain *how* the Spirit of God produces this assurance and persuasion of sonship in the mind of the believer. It certainly does not. And where does the Scripture attempt to explain any of the operations of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man? These operations are frequently referred to in the book of God, as being admonitory, corrective, comforting, sanctifying. But no attempt is made to show the *modus operandi*, the exact method in which his most gracious results are produced. The definition we have adopted assumes, that it is by the Spirit's direct and immediate influence exerted on the mind. And when we have said this, we have said almost all we certainly know. We have sufficient reasons for avoiding any attempt at describing, minutely, how the divine testimony is borne:—

First,—Because, as to the circumstances attending it, the mode of the Spirit's operation is greatly diversified. As the Spirit of adoption, he is not confined nor restricted to any one particular method of working. There is the same diversity and variety in this, as in all the other operations of the divine Agent. The conversion

of the soul is brought about in ways the most dissimilar. Scarcely are two cases in all respects alike. Ponder the records contained in the Acts of the Apostles, and you are immediately struck with this. You perceive the eunuch enlightened while riding in his chariot; he patiently reads the Holy Scriptures. You perceive Saul of Tarsus spending three days and nights in darkness and distress, after that wondrous vision seen by him on his way to Damascus. While, on the other hand, you read of Lydia, that the Lord gently opened her heart to receive the truth. Now, as in conversion itself, considered generally, the operations of the divine Agent are varied in different cases; so in the witness of the Spirit, which is intimately connected with conversion, the same diversity will be found to occur. If, therefore, we should proceed to state any definite method in which the Spirit may be expected to act, we might possibly lead the penitent seeker of salvation into mistake. Should we say, "The Spirit of adoption works in this way or in that," the result would probably be, that in no other way, than in the one which we had indicated, would the earnest and praying soul expect the knowledge of salvation. Whereas, the right method in which to wait for this blessing is, to be willing to receive it in any

way in which it may please the divine Spirit to communicate it; and with whatever attendant circumstances it may be invested.

A second reason why we do not enter on any more formal attempt to describe the manner in which this divine testimony is given is, that Jesus Christ appears to have admonished us that all such attempts must necessarily fail. Comparing the manner of the Spirit's operation upon the mind of man to the inexplicable motion of the currents of air, the Saviour says, (John iii, 8,) "The wind bloweth where it listeth;" that is, with great diversity, both in its direction and its force;—"and thou hearest the sound thereof." The sense of hearing assures thee of the fact. Thou hast every kind of evidence to convince thee that so it is. Thou feelest its effect on thy own person; thou beholdest it on all around thee. "But whence it cometh, and whither it goeth," —how it rises—why it falls—what are the hidden causes that produce the wondrous diversity of its operations—this thou canst not tell. It is all mystery. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

In this striking comparison used by the Saviour, it seems to be clearly intimated, that the divine operation upon the spirit of man may not be the less real and certain, although it be inex-

plicable. Still further, we should infer, that with a uniformity in the result there may be united great diversity in the attendant circumstances. This assurance of the present favor of God may be given, for instance, under the preaching of the word. "Faith cometh by hearing;" and, not unfrequently, we apprehend, it is while listening to the announcement of the gospel, that the soul believes and becomes entitled to its benefits; and the Holy Ghost immediately affords his testimony, and seals the spirit as the property of God.

Or the witness of the Spirit may be obtained while reading the Bible, and faith, as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, may come by reading as well as by hearing. Or it may result from the encouraging advices and admonitions of a friend. Or it may even spring up in the soul apparently apart from all outward means. It may be given in the silence of midnight musings, or amid the activity of mid-day engagements.

Whenever, or in what circumstances soever, this divine testimony is obtained, it is given by the Spirit of God "opening the eyes of our understanding," or, according to another Scriptural phrase, taking away the veil from the heart. Immediately, under the influence of his

sacred illumination, we see what we could not see before, although it is plainly written on the page of inspiration, that he

> "Who did for every sinner die,
> Hath surely died for me."

> "Then, only then, we feel
> Our interest in his blood;
> And cry with joy unspeakable,
> Thou art my Lord, my God."

But, after all, the manner in which this satisfactory persuasion is wrought in the soul still remains a mystery. Not only is it impossible to explain it in words, but it cannot even be comprehended by our thought. And, in this respect, it stands on the same grounds as the other direct operations of the Spirit of God upon the human mind.

This is our answer to those who feel inclined to object to the views given above, on the ground that they include the belief of a direct influence of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man. "You believe," say they, "in a new inspiration, —an inspiration additional to and apart from that of the Holy Scriptures." Our reply is,— We believe in no inspiration at all similar to that which was vouchsafed to holy men who wrote the Scriptures of truth. We do not be-

lieve in the necessity, nor in the present possibility, of any inspiration for the purpose of adding to, or of confirming, what is already written. The volume of inspiration, we are aware, is closed and sealed; and no man must add to the contents of that book, but at his peril. Yet it follows not that we are forbidden to believe that the Holy Spirit directly influences the minds of men. If you renounce all belief of this, and condemn the notion under the general phrase of *a new inspiration*, do you not (we would ask) condemn yourselves? If you are sincerely and truly Christians, you believe, and must necessarily believe, that a direct influence of the Holy Spirit in the production of the entire inward change is exerted upon the human mind. You believe, for instance, that the Spirit of God reproves and convinces of sin; that he works in the heart of the penitent a full and complete persuasion of the number, and greatness, and aggravations of his sins;—that the same divine Agent gives such a perception of danger, as produces alarm and trembling anxiety;—that he works in the soul a sense of helplessness and bondage, under which the penitent exclaims, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" that he produces a godly sorrow for sin;—in a word, that the whole of

that mysterious process by which the soul turns again to God, and which we term repentance, proceeds entirely from the operation of the Holy Spirit of God.

If this is believed, (and it must be so by all who believe in a change of heart,—by all who acknowledge the necessity of conversion,) then the point is conceded, that there is a direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind. If you believe that he maketh sorrowful, it surely is not unreasonable to believe that he maketh glad. The same divine Spirit who for salutary purposes wounds the soul, can also pour in the oil of joy. If he gives the knowledge of our guilt, we may surely believe that he also gives the knowledge of its removal.

We cannot but think that there is a want of consistency—a shrinking from carrying out their own principles—on the part of those who deny that there is any direct operation of the Holy Spirit in attesting the believer's sonship. Up to that point, they have insisted on the necessity of such influence;—they have, with the most undoubting certainty, taught that it exists. They have represented it as enlightening the understanding, as bowing the will, as renewing the affections. They believe that there is an influence upon the minds of all good men, leading

their steps, forming their character, admonishing, strengthening, and comforting them. Now, as these points of belief are all established by sufficient Scriptural authority, so, on authority equally plain and undoubted, is the doctrine established, that one especial office of the third person in the Trinity is that of the Spirit of adoption. Nothing more direct or immediate is contended for in the latter case than in the former. If it is reasonable to believe, that in reproving, convincing, and converting, the Spirit's influence on the mind is plainly taught in the Scripture, it cannot be unreasonable to believe, that in comforting us, and sealing our adoption, the same influence is exerted, and in a method substantially the same.

This may, perhaps, be met by the observation, that in convincing, reproving, guiding, and in all the other operations ascribed to him, the Spirit acts *through the medium of the word.* The difference (it may be said) between the two opinions, is, that the one speaks of the influence of the Spirit as being *directly* upon the mind, and the other represents it as being *through the medium* of the Scriptures. The point which distinguishes between Wesleyans and others, (it may be alledged,) is, that the former deny what the others affirm, namely,—that the opera-

tions of the Spirit are through the medium of the inspired word of God.

We beg leave to say, that this representation is quite incorrect. We do not deny that the Spirit of God acts, commonly, through the medium of the word. By this we mean, that he applies the Scripture to the heart—opens the eyes of the understanding to perceive its meaning and its force—makes the sword of the Spirit sharp in its edge, and resistless in its stroke—that by this means he reveals the suitableness and glory of Christ, and guides, and admonishes, and comforts the people of God. He is "the Spirit of truth," and he influences the understanding through the medium of divine revealed truth. But even this supposes an immediate and direct influence of the Holy Ghost upon the mind. For you cannot surely suppose, that it is the word which does all this. It is the Spirit that, *by the word*, enlightens and converts; and it is also true, that he *can* act without it. In fact, by whatever instrumentality, or through whatever medium it may please him to work, his operation is immediate and direct. We cannot conceive of an indirect operation of the divine Spirit. It is either the influence of the Spirit exerted on spirit, or it is nothing at all.

Leaving then, here, the mode of the Spirit's working shrouded in that mysteriousness which envelops alike all his wondrous operations; we may go on to say, that the immediate effects of his communicating to the soul the persuasion of its acceptance with God are more easily ascertained. These are diversified indeed; but as they are frequently alluded to in Scripture, we shall have a clear and sure light to guide us in the investigation.

1. The witness of the Spirit first becomes manifest in *the removal of the sense of guilt.* In endeavoring to trace the outlines of this interesting period in the believer's experience, we fix first upon the removal of that heavy burden under which he has perhaps long labored.

This is a point which stands out most prominently to view. This is a particular which will be long remembered; or, we might more properly say, which will never be forgotten. All his sins were set against him in battle array—all summoned, as it were, by the convincing Spirit out of the gloom of past forgetfulness, to appear at once and depose against him their fearful accusations, with a clearness and force neither to be evaded nor denied. A conscious and indescribable sense of the wrath of God oppressed and weighed down his soul. It was (to use a

striking Scriptural figure) the arrow of the Almighty, which drinketh up the spirit. Fears of future judgment, fears of hell, and a tormenting fear of death, as the forerunner of the whole; these were his sad companions through many a sunless day, and through many a sleepless and anxious night.

But the time of deliverance arrived. The clouds broke asunder, and gradually revealed the dawn of the morning. Or, this dark night gave place, it may be in an instant, to the meridian brightness of day. The sense of guilt was gone. The feeling of exposure to the wrath of God was happily removed by an act of trust in the atonement. The first effect of having "received the atonement," is to have received also the Spirit of adoption attesting our pardon.

2. Then *peace with God* is the immediate result. This is a fruit of the Spirit immediately consequent upon justification; and the Holy Ghost, in bearing his testimony to the one, produces the other. How inestimably precious is this calm composure of the soul,—this quiet of conscience,—this resting of the spirit as in the arms of the Saviour, perfectly free from all alarms! This peace of God may truly be said to pass all human understanding. None of the ordinary principles of mental reasoning or inves-

tigation can explain it or account for it. Placing all its hopes upon the enduring foundation of God's revealed mercy,—looking to the cross,—and persuaded by the witnessing Spirit of its interest in the meritorious death of the Saviour, the soul finds a settled peace, an indescribable sense of safety;—dismisses all its fears, and says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his:" "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

3. More than peace attends this happy change. Joy in the Holy Ghost is the immediate result. The deliverance appears so great, the escape from eternal misery so wonderful, that joy springs up in the soul and inspires the lips with praise. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee, for though thou wast angry with me, thy anger is turned away." It is a joy more elevated than aught which has its source on earth. It is "unspeakable and (δεδοξασμενη) full of glory." Celestial in its origin, radiant with the light of heaven, it is near akin to the joy which blessed spirits feel.

Of this joy, in a greater or less degree, (for it may be various in different individuals,) every one blessed with the witness of the Spirit is a partaker. And so strikingly marked are the peace and joy which are inseparable from this witness, that in the familiar communications of

Christians with each other, mention is more frequently made of these joyous results than of the witness itself, which is the source of them. To *find peace*, to be *made happy*, to be *able to rejoice*, are familiar phrases which ordinary Christians use to set forth this inestimable Scriptural privilege. By a figure of speech,—a pardonable metonymy,—the effect is dwelt upon, and the cause is less adverted to. It must still, however, be understood, that neither this peace, nor this joy, nor this happiness, could subsist without the testimony of the Holy Spirit which produces them.

4. There is immediately wrought in the soul (at least this is often the case, and especially where the transition has been sudden) the consciousness of a great and important change,—a sense, as it were, of new existence,—a feeling of new life, which, transferring itself to the things around, gives to all things the appearance of having been regenerated. The sun appears to shine more brightly; the face of nature is arrayed in smiles, and all things take their character and color from the happy state of the soul within. Old things are passed away. All things are become new. A new creation has taken place which has given a new aspect to all nature.

And here we might notice the effects of those

feelings of love and delight toward God which are immediately called forth in the soul which is now assured of his favor. But on this subject we propose to dwell somewhat more at large in a subsequent chapter, where we shall have to show how the witness of the Spirit stands inseparably connected with all that is vital and important in religion. We have here merely mentioned a few of the more visible results which ordinarily present themselves, where the Spirit bears witness to the adoption of the soul into the family of God. We set out with the attempt to explain the mode in which this witness is borne; but finding no encouragement from the Holy Scriptures to carry out these investigations, we have been led to notice some of its attendant signs. The mode of the Spirit's witness is, in a great degree, hidden from human sight. But it is known by its results, and the signs following it are infallible.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONFIRMATION OF THE SPIRIT'S TESTIMONY BY THE WITNESS OF OUR OWN SPIRIT.

We adverted, in the close of the last chapter, to some of the happy consequences which immediately result from the testimony of the Spirit to the believer's adoption. In the present chapter we are about to show that these fruits of the Spirit are in proof of the genuineness of the testimony. They are the tests by which it is confirmed. They constitute, in themselves, a joint and concurrent testimony; which, with some propriety, has been called the testimony of our own spirit,—as the Scripture appears to recognize the testimony of our own conscience as having some part in giving us assurance toward God.

To every careful reader of the New Testament it must have appeared that, subsequently to the communication of the Spirit as the Spirit of adoption, and after he has shed the love of God abroad in the heart, and imparted the Saviour's legacy of peace, and produced an unspeakable joy in the soul, there is a confirmation of his testimony, derived from the existence of

those graces and excellences which he alone can produce.

If it be asked whether it is more proper to speak of the witness of the Spirit *to* our spirit, or of the witness of the Spirit *with* our spirit, (which is the apostle's mode of speaking in Rom. viii, 16,) we reply that both terms are proper. But it must be born in mind, that they each refer to a distinct and different period of the believer's experience. The witness of the Spirit, when given in the first moment of our justification, is a witness *to* our spirit. There is, as yet, no concurrent evidence from any gracious dispositions found in us; for those graces do not yet exist. The Spirit testifies to our free justification as ungodly persons; who, till the moment of our pardon, were destitute of all good. The testimony of the Spirit, therefore, must be, in the first instance, independent of all other evidence. It stands apart. Not so in the subsequent experience of the believer. When time has been given for the production of the filial dispositions, and of the graces peculiar to the children of God,—then these latter become so many parts of the evidence of our sonship. They are joined to it, and confirm it; and the witness of the Spirit, as an habitual enjoyment and privilege of Christians, is the conjoint tes-

timony of the Spirit of God and of our own spirit.

This distinction which we have endeavored to point out, between a testimony given *to* our spirits and a testimony borne concurrently *with* our spirits, is plainly indicated in the New Testament. Of the former, St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Galatians, iv, 6. God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, because we are sons, and as soon as the act of divine adoption has taken place; and immediately the soul, without further evidence, without reasoning, without inference, but purely as the spontaneous result of the direct evidence afforded by the Holy Ghost, cries out in delighted assurance, Abba, Father.

But in the parallel passage of Romans, (viii, 16,) the apostle appears to speak of the same privilege in its mature character; as the believer lives and walks in the enjoyment of it. There the witness of the divine Spirit stands not alone. It is accompanied by the testimony of our own spirit. The Spirit of God bears witness *with*, *together with*, the spirit of the believer:—the meaning of which must be, not only that he bears this testimony *at the same time*, but also *to the same fact.*

Different indeed, essentially different, must

be the witness of our own spirit from the kind of testimony afforded by the Spirit of God, as will appear when we come more fully to explain wherein it consists. But still it is evidence to establish the same point. The apostle's term, *συμμαρτυρεω*, "beareth witness with," is the very term which was used in the Greek language to denote a concurrence of testimony, when more than one witness testified to the same thing; and, as a plurality of witnesses was usually exhibited in courts of justice, those who were joined in giving testimony to the same point were called, *συμμαρτυρες*, joint witnesses.*

This matter has been treated by Mr. Wesley, (Sermons, vol. i, pages 85, 93, &c.,) with a fullness which leaves little to be desired. It deserves here, however, to be noted, that between the publication of his first and second sermon on the Witness of the Spirit twenty years elapsed. So that the second sermon must, in all fairness, be taken to contain his mature and deliberate convictions on this important subject. And should there be any apparent discrepancy between these two discourses,—(it will, we are persuaded, be little more than ap-

* See some further observations in proof of this, under Note A, *Appendix*.

parent,)—the propriety of interpreting the first sermon by the second will immediately appear; as well as the propriety of giving the first place, in point of authority, to that which appears second in point of time. Twenty years of the life of so great a man,—at a period, too, when his faculties were in their full vigor, and during which period the doctrine was undergoing perpetual discussion;—twenty years of serious deliberation, on so interesting a point, render this second sermon of Mr. Wesley a very important document; and we feel inclined to take it as containing his mature views on one of the most vital doctrines which he, as a minister, felt himself called upon to proclaim.

In the first of these two discourses he appears not fully to have made up his mind as to whether the apostle, in the sixteenth verse of the eighth chapter to the Romans, speaks of more than one witness; namely, that of the Spirit of God. He thought it might be allowable to render the passage, "beareth witness *to* our spirit;" supposing that the preposition, *συν*, might mean, *at the same time*. But, to use his own words, "after twenty years' further consideration," the conclusion at which he arrived is thus expressed:—"It is manifest here are two witnesses mentioned, who, together, testify

the same thing;—the Spirit of God, and our own spirit. The late bishop of London, in his sermon on this text, seems astonished that any one can doubt of this, which appears upon the very face of the words."

We are satisfied of the entire correctness of this conclusion; and shall here proceed on the conviction, that the witness of our own spirit is always, in the ordinary experience of believers, superadded to, and conjoined with, the divine testimony communicated by the Spirit of God.

What then are we to understand by the witness of our own spirit? It is this. The Holy Ghost, in the sacred Scriptures, has laid down certain marks of the children of God. By careful self-examination we ascertain that we possess those Scriptural marks of sonship. The inference is then correctly and easily drawn, that the gracious act of divine adoption has taken place with reference to ourselves.

It is, therefore, plainly of the first importance that we should rightly ascertain what are those marks of filial relationship to God which are drawn from the Scriptures of truth. We open the New Testament on the First Epistle of St. John, and, simply as a specimen, by way of showing how easily those marks are discovered and applied, we take from that interesting por-

tion of Scripture the distinguishing qualities of the children of God, as they are mentioned by St. John. They are partly negative, and partly of a positive character.

1. "He that is born of God sinneth not,"—that is, he does not sin by the commission of outward acts of transgression. He has obtained a victory over the power of evil. That which formerly led him captive, and tyrannized over him, has lost all its power and control. He has obtained, by the grace of Christ, a victory such as philosophy never achieved, such as was never obtained by poor helpless humanity, except through this divinely appointed medium. The faith which he has exercised in the atonement of the Son of God, for the justification of his person, has brought not only a deliverance from guilt, but power also to subdue sin, to cast off its yoke, and trample upon its usurped authority. And whereas he was formerly continually yielding to sin against his better judgment, and notwithstanding his firmest resolves, —he now finds the power imparted to resist all sin, and to triumph over the strongest temptations. The promise is indubitably fulfilled in him, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

2. Another criterion of a negative character,

applied by St. John, is the absence of the love of the world. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Where the love of the Father is, the love of the world is excluded. And to decide on this point, as well as on many others, the voice of conscience must be listened to. Do I so love the world as to seek my happiness from it? Do I strive for its possessions, with any other aim than to do good with them? Do I seek its applause, or shrink from its censure, so as to be influenced, in any part of my duty, by this motive? Should I feel unhappy, if all its glory and all its attractions were for ever withdrawn from my view? There are a few searching questions of this kind which, by the answers to them that conscience would suggest, might afford us light in reference to the inquiry, whether we love the world in the sense in which the apostle has used the word. It is a matter of the highest importance to be decided aright: for the test applied by St. John is absolutely exclusive. No man must suppose that he can have in his heart the love of the world and the love of the Father at the same time.

3. It would, further, be sufficient to exclude any one from all title to be deemed a child of God, if hatred were cherished in his heart to-

ward any of his brethren. "He that hateth his brother abideth in death." No unkind feeling can permanently dwell in the hearts of those whom God has adopted. They cannot hate the unworthiest of God's creatures; much less a Christian brother. They will pity and pray for those who love them not; but the love which has been shown to themselves, forbids them to hate others. They may often differ in judgment, they may be dissimilar in their tastes, from many who call the same Saviour "Lord," but they will not suffer that difference to degenerate into hatred. They may have, as they really believe, just cause of complaint against a Christian brother. But they cherish not an unforgiving spirit. They are taught by St. John, that cherished enmity and a refusal to forgive are utterly alien to a Christian bosom,—things which cannot coexist with a filial relation to God. As well might darkness dwell in, and issue from, the sun, as an unforgiving disposition find a permanent residence in a genuine follower of the Redeemer. Moreover, tender compassion for all who are in affliction, and an expansion of the heart in acts of benevolence to relieve distress, will be evident in the children of God; and will constitute part of the evidence of their title to that honorable appellation. "For

whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up the bowels of his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" These marks (and there are others in addition) are of a negative and exclusive character. By this we mean, that those in whom the commission of outward sin, or the love of the world, or unkind feeling toward any soul of man, is found, are by these Scriptural tests declared *not* to be the children of God. They are therefore marks adapted to assist in the important duty of self-examination. But the more positive and confirmatory marks of divine sonship we now proceed to consider.

1. "We know that we are of God, because we love the brethren." This is a test which may be easily applied. There is, among all the children of God, a peculiar affection for each other. Wherever the features of the divine character appear, they attract the love of all who are like-minded. Wherever God has set the stamp and seal of his paternity, there all his children recognize his infallible signature,—and, loving him who begat, they love all that are begotten of him. Nor can it be difficult for us to decide, whether we feel for the children of God an affectionate regard, such as springs from a similarity of nature, and from a partici-

pation in the same high and holy principles of conduct. Our own consciousness will tell us, if it be true, that we love them, because we are like them.

2. Again: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." This is a test which St. John again and again applies; and the frequency with which the sentiment is repeated, shows that the apostle judged the importance of it to be great, and the application of it to be comparatively easy. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." 1 John ii, 3. The apostle, in these words, evidently assumes that a man cannot but be conscious whether he now yields an habitual attention and obedience to all the divine commands. If he be a child of God, his conscience will "bear him witness in the Holy Ghost" that he studies to please God in all things. He joins in the holy exultation of Saint Paul, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, ... we have our conversation in the world." It need not surely be with me a matter of doubt whether I uniformly regard the will of God as supreme—his published law as my rule of life—whether I take up and perform my daily work, as a series of acts of obedience to him. Can I

say with David, "O how I love thy law;"—"I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart?" Psa. xl, 8. There is here also, as in all the other instances, an appeal to conscience. The spirit of every child of God is an obedient spirit, and the obedience he renders is one test of his sonship.

3. Conscious love to God, and the holy joy which attends it, will constitute another characteristic of the sons of God. The filial relationship is the source of filial love, and spontaneously produces it in the heart when that relationship is revealed to the soul by the Holy Ghost. We love our heavenly Father who has first loved us, and has revealed to us his love, that he might kindle a corresponding emotion in these naturally cold and unfeeling hearts. We then "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ," by whom we have now received the atonement. There rises up in the soul, immediately upon its adoption, a well-spring of sacred comfort,—an indescribable sense of safety, accompanied with bright and cheering hopes of immortal glory; and the result is, that joy, sometimes indeed greater and sometimes less in amount, becomes an inhabitant of the breast. This love and this joy are conscious blessings; we are certified of their existence because we feel them; and in

reference to their existence there can be no mistake. Moreover, in this their peculiar and filial character, they exist only in the children of God, and they therefore become Scriptural and sure marks, by which the evidence of our sonship may be confirmed.

4. The apostle Paul (Rom. v, 1) further notices, as a distinct result of this new relation in which we stand toward our heavenly Father, "peace with God;" and in enumerating the various Christian graces in another epistle, Gal. v, 22, after mentioning love and joy, he gives the third place, in point of importance, to that "*peace with God*" which he had, in the former passage, described as the immediate result of being justified by faith. Between this peace of mind and the previous trouble and distress the difference is great. The transition from the sense of guilt to the consciousness of the divine favor is too obvious to be mistaken. The storm and tempest of alarm and dread which preceded must needs render the great calm which follows them the more memorable and striking. It therefore follows, that this peace—the inseparable attendant upon a state of adoption—must needs become a criterion by which the genuineness of the inward witness of our adoption may be discriminated.

5. To sum up the whole: The witness of the Spirit is always to be confirmed by the fruits of the Spirit. The inward testimony is to be corroborated by the outward signs. Those marks of the sons of God are, therefore, made so clear and plain that he who runs may read. Wherever the fruits of the Spirit are described in the word of God, (and they are frequently adverted to,) there are the confirming tokens of our sonship. All the long-suffering, gentleness, goodness,—all the fidelity, meekness, and temperance,—whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report,—all the patience, brotherly kindness, charity,—all the courage, victory over temptation, and resignation to our heavenly Father's will, which the word of God describes as being found in those who belong to him,—all these Christian graces will bring their testimony, that we have been taken out of the family of the world, and translated into the family of God.

The process by which we arrive at this conclusion is short, and simple, and satisfactory. It is a purely logical inference. Whoever he be that possesses these marks of the children of God, the same is an adopted child of God; but I have these marks, therefore I am a child of God. As to the first, or major proposition, it

is in itself sufficiently plain, and needs no proof. As to the second, or minor proposition, namely, that I have those marks; its proof is in the man's own consciousness; and for this reason the whole of the evidence is called *the witness of our own spirit.* "How does it appear," says Mr. Wesley, (Works, vol. i, p. 87,) "that we have these marks? Observe, that the meaning of the question is, how does it appear to *ourselves*, not to *others.* I would ask him that proposes this question, How does it appear to you, that you are alive, and that you are now in ease, and not in pain? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness, you will know if your soul is alive to God. . . . You cannot but perceive if you love, rejoice, and delight in God;—if you love your neighbor as yourself; if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and long-suffering. And with regard to the outward mark of the children of God, which is, according to St. John, the keeping his commandments, you undoubtedly know in your own breast, if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you."

This second point being thus ascertained,—or, in other words, our conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost that these marks of

the children of God are found in us,—we may draw the inference with undoubting confidence; and our own spirit bears its testimony, together with that of the Spirit of God, that we have been adopted into the divine family.

But here it may be said, Why may we not at once, and in the first instance, go for evidence of our adoption to those signs and tokens which are drawn from the infallible word? If there are plain and certain criteria of the children of God, given us by himself in the inspired volume, are not these near at hand, available, and sufficient for all the purposes of edification and comfort?

To this question we answer, first, that, supposing it were possible to attain to a certain degree of evidence of our filial relationship to God, without any direct witness of his Spirit, it would still remain a serious question, whether we are at liberty to set aside one of the especial offices of the Holy Ghost. As the Spirit of adoption, he is sent by the Father into the hearts of believers, to bear witness to their sonship. He enables them to cry, Abba, Father; to give confident utterance to the language of filial love. It surely does not become them to inquire whether there be not some other way in which they may be enabled to utter the same

delightful accents. The way in which God has appointed that they should seek the assurance of his favor *must be the best.*

But we answer next, that although, for the sake of argument, we may assume it to be possible to refer at once to the marks of sonship recorded in Scripture; yet we are persuaded that, if we leave out of view the witness of God's Spirit, this looking for the distinguishing qualities of his children will be in vain. The marks themselves will not be found. They are the fruits of the witnessing of the Spirit, and cannot exist without his previous testimony to our adoption.

To instance in one only of these distinguishing qualities:—We must, of course, love God before we can have that consciousness of filial love to him which constitutes one of the surest marks of our sonship. But, before we can love God with a filial love, we must know his paternal love to us. Now to reveal God's love to us, is the very end for which the Spirit of adoption is given. To look, therefore, for the love of God before we have the testimony of the Spirit, is to anticipate the effect before the existence of its cause.

The order of the divine procedure appears to be this,—first, on our penitently believing in

the atoning death of Christ, God adopts us into his family. In the same moment he gives us his Spirit to witness this gracious act to our spirit. His pardoning love is then revealed; and we, as the immediate consequence, love our heavenly Parent. Then, and not till then, we have the witness in ourselves—the witness of our own spirit—that one of the inseparable marks of adoption exists in our breasts. In short, we must love God before we can have the witness of our own spirit; and we must know the love of God to us by his own direct testimony before love to him will be felt in our hearts. The direct testimony of the Spirit must needs, therefore, be first in the order of time.

This argument, however, by which we prove that the witness of God's Spirit must precede the witness of our own, has been objected to. It has been said, that we assume too much in laying down the proposition, that a direct testimony of God's love to us is necessary before we can love him. May we not (it has been asked) be assured of God's love to us, on the testimony of his word; and may we not love him because by reading that word we know that he has loved us? To this it is easy to reply, that what we read in his holy word is the declaration of God's love to the human race in general. But the

conviction of this, is a thing quite distinct from the delightful persuasion of his paternal love to us in our individual adoption. The one is an intellectual perception of truth; the other is a feeling. The one rests in the head; the other influences and elevates the heart.

The belief that God has loved the whole world —that his love is wonderful, and passing knowledge—that the death of the Son of God is a proof and an exponent of this love—and that he, by the unspeakable grace of the Father, tasted death for every man: the full and entire credence of these truths is, indeed, something great. Theoretically, it is one of the most solemn and momentous convictions of the human understanding. But many possess it, and yet derive little or no personal comfort from it. There is an additional truth which alone can bring the desired consolation:—He "loved me, and gave himself for me." The belief of God's general love to all mankind may induce the feeling of admiration, of wonder, perhaps even of gratitude. But to be persuaded of our personal interest in our heavenly Father's love—which is certainly included in uttering the accents of filial confidence, and crying, "Abba, Father"—this is the spring and source of *filial* love to him.

The result of the whole is this: What God has joined together let not man attempt to separate. As the witness of the divine Spirit, and the witness of our own spirit, are spoken of as united, in producing the habitual sense of filial relationship which is enjoyed by believers; no man should content himself with the one in the entire absence of the other. Let no one take up and be satisfied with the supposed fruits of the Spirit, in the absence of the witness of the Spirit. There may be occasional gleams of joy—foretastes of peace—and some degree of power over sin, previously to the sealing of the Spirit of adoption. But they should not be rested in. They are given to encourage those who are the subjects of them to seek the completeness of that higher and happier state of which they are the foretaste.

Apart from the clear evidence of the Spirit of adoption, these fruits of the Spirit will necessarily be defective. The peace will not be that deep and serene peace "which passeth all understanding," and which is especially wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God when he seals the heirs of salvation. The joy will not be that joy unspeakable which results from the preciousness of Christ, when the soul's interest in him is assured by the inward and divine testimony.

In a word, the change which the Spirit works—if it is looked to as a primary evidence, setting aside his gracious office in the act of adoption—even all the fruits of the Spirit, from love, which is the foremost of the train, to victory over the world and sin; all these will be found defective and shadowy, totally incapable of producing that satisfactory assurance which is sought from them.

The correctness of this representation will be proved, we have reason to think, by the experience of those who have been led by their creed to disbelieve the doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit; and to expect such evidence only of their acceptance with God as can be gathered from the effect of religion upon their tempers and lives. Great uncertainty as to their religious state is the very general result. We do not, in fact, find that they ever arrive at anything that can be called a comfortable persuasion of their being accepted and pardoned. Interminable doubts arise in their minds; and fears lest the evidence should be incomplete. In the most favorable cases, their days of bright and cheering hope are succeeded by dark hours of painful apprehension, lest they should have rested the inference of their acceptance with God on doubtful and insufficient grounds. Now,

it is no departure from charity to suppose that the Spirit of God withholds from them his consolatory influences because they withhold from him his appropriate honors. They leave out of their creed, more or less entirely, the office of the Spirit of adoption; and he leaves them in a state of doubting uncertainty as to the relation in which they stand toward God.

It is deeply to be deplored that such should be the effect of an imperfect teaching of the privileges of Christianity. But, with reference to the persons of whose unsatisfactory experience of the comforts of religion we have remarked upon, there is reason to conclude, that if they had sat under a ministry which unfolded to them habitually their privilege to receive, by simply believing the Spirit of adoption, they would have been saved from many doubts, and fears, and sorrows; and that they would have been more happy, more holy, and more useful.

From the conviction, therefore, that we are not at liberty to set aside any vital doctrine of the Christian system—such as we consider to be the doctrine of the witness of the divine Spirit in our adoption—persuaded, moreover, that all evidence, apart from a divine testimony, will fail to satisfy us on the momentous point of our

reception into the family of God—we repeat our admonition—let no one rest satisfied with the supposed fruits of the Spirit, if his inward testimony be not enjoyed.

On the other hand, we would be equally strenuous in insisting that no one ought to rest in the supposed *witness* of the Spirit without the accompanying fruits of the Spirit. If the comfort of our souls, and the vitality of our religion, mainly depend upon our possessing the direct witness of our adoption, we would, in addition, say, that the very *safety* of our religious state is closely connected with our exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit, as the indirect testimony. In the absence of these, there would, indeed, be cause of apprehension. For we wish not to close our eyes to the fact that self-deception, in reference to our religious state, is quite possible. The devices of Satan are numberless, and endlessly diversified; and safety is only to be secured by taking heed to the regulation of the heart and life according to the written word. "Blessed is the man that feareth always," with a jealous and godly fear of mistaking his real character, and missing his heavenward path. But all danger of mistake is prevented, if we adhere to the Scriptural method. It is, in its completeness, *sufficient* to produce the most entire and

comfortable persuasion of the great fact we wish to ascertain; for it is the voice of the Spirit of the living God. On the other hand, it is perfectly *safe;* for the gracious fruits which are its immediate result are adapted to preserve us from all danger of having mistaken that divine communication.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT ESSENTIAL TO THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOUL.

HAVING, in the previous chapters, stated the subject of this essay doctrinally, and having endeavored to make it clear from Scripture what the privilege of believers really is, we must now look at the matter in its experimental and practical bearings. The attention of the reader will, in this chapter, be directed to those considerations which demonstrate the great importance of this doctrine in the Christian system. It is no mere theory for which we contend. All that is vital—all that is transforming in Christianity is involved in it. In the question—Does the great Jehovah love me with a Father's tenderness; and, as the result of this, do I render

to him my heart in filial love?—there are included all the questions of greatest moment which can be asked or answered by an immortal spirit. It is in effect to say, Am I justified? Am I regenerated? Am I a Christian? Have I the principle of obedience to God in my heart? Have I such confidence in God that I can commit all my concerns into his hand? Have I, in a word, a well-grounded hope of heaven? We shall endeavor to prove that this intimate union between the witness of the Spirit, and all that is most important in experimental religion, does actually exist; and, if this be the case, it will plainly appear to be a matter deserving our most serious attention to understand this connection; and to have it settled in our minds as one of the established principles of the spiritual life.

1. The witness of the Spirit, in the first place, is so intimately connected with our free justification by faith in the blood of Christ, that the one cannot be rightly understood without the other. Among the many definitions that have been given of the justification of a believer, we select the following as the most ample and complete, perhaps, that was ever put into language:—To justify a sinner, is to account and consider him relatively righteous, and to deal with him as such, notwithstanding his past actual unrighte-

ousness; by clearing, absolving, discharging, and releasing him from various penal evils, and especially from the wrath of God, and the liability to eternal death, which, by that past unrighteousness, he had deserved; and by accepting him as if just, and admitting him to the state, the privileges, and the rewards of righteousness.* In this definition it is, of course, supposed that the gracious act of divine mercy, by which we are justified, is made known to the pardoned believer. It does not pass in the divine mind without any communication being made to him who is the subject of it. For, if he were left ignorant as to the important question of the divine favor toward him, he could not be said to be again admitted "to the state, privileges, and rewards of righteousness." To preach the complete and entire gospel, it is not sufficient to announce generally that, upon our believing, we are justified, cleared, and absolved from the penal evils which we have merited. But, to make the matter complete, it must be added that, with our justification is connected our adoption into the heavenly family; and with our adoption is also conjoined the gift of the Spirit of adoption, testifying that we are the children of God.

* Bunting's Sermon on Justification, page 7.

The doctrine of justification by faith may evidently be preached very imperfectly. By some, who to a certain extent deserve the name of evangelists, it is often so imperfectly preached as to deprive it, in no small measure, of its Scriptural efficacy. A preacher may show, for example, with sufficient clearness, that by the works of the law no flesh can be justified before God. He may prove that by faith in the atonement of Christ, and by that alone, can any man be forgiven. If, however, he leave the matter in that abstract form, it remains in the shape of a theory and a creed; rests in the mind inoperative; and none of the important results of salvation are produced. But if, in addition, he show that God does something more in justification than forgive sin; that he adopts all who believe as his sons, and sends the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, testifying the filial relation they now stand in toward him; then the matter becomes one of immense personal concern to all who receive the gospel message. This view, above all others, tends to bring home to the man's bosom his own individual concern in the present possession of the great salvation; tends to impress his mind with the infinite moment of this question, "Am I in a right state of religious experience, as a professed disciple of

Christ?" and leads, by necessary consequence, to the most careful searchings of the heart.

> "If now the Witness were in me,
> Would he not testify of thee,
> In Jesus reconciled?
> And should I not with faith draw nigh,
> And boldly Abba, Father, cry,—
> And know myself thy child?"

The doctrine of justification appears therefore to be incomplete without that of the adoption of the justified person into the divine family; and this latter must be understood to be inseparably associated with the office of the Spirit of adoption, sent into the heart of every justified believer, to attest the gracious act of his heavenly Father. It is in this order of connection, as now stated, that we place the threefold blessing of justification, adoption, and the witness of the Spirit. In the order of thought, it is, first, justification, then adoption, then the witness of adoption. But at the same time it ought to be observed that this relates solely to the order of thinking. In point of fact, the blessings are coexistent and inseparable.

But may not a man be justified, (it has been asked,) and consequently adopted into the divine family, without being favored with a clear assu-

rance of his acceptance with God? To this important question we answer, that, in asserting the constant union of the blessings of justification and of the witness of adoption, we speak of the usual method of God's dealings with his people; and, moreover, of his dealings with them in circumstances where the gospel, in all its extent and amplitude of privilege, is fully preached. We would not positively affirm that there are no exceptions to the general rule that a justified person, on condition that he hear the whole gospel, is blessed with a sense of pardon. The most judicious divines, whose attention has been directed to this subject, have seen reason to conclude that there may be a few exceptions. There may be states of the bodily health, which, for a time, seem to preclude the enjoyment of comfort. A derangement of the nervous system may sometimes cause a settled gloom, which oppresses the spirits, and interrupts the joy of the soul. Where the piety of the individual is undoubted—where the influence of religion over the whole man is unquestionable—and yet the soul remains in darkness as to the divine favor—we are obliged to place such cases among the mysteries of God's dealings, which the light of eternity alone will illumine. The cases are so rare, where the gospel is fully declared, that, as

exceptions, they argue nothing against the general rule of the divine procedure; and the causes of many of these exceptions, could we scrutinize the heart, would doubtless immediately become plain to our apprehension.

On the other hand, where the office of the Spirit, as the Spirit of adoption, is in fact set aside in the ministry of the word, by the doctrine that there is no other witness of the Spirit but the fruit of the Spirit, we would by no means assert, that all who are found destitute of an assurance of salvation are under the wrath and displeasure of God. Their experience cannot be expected generally to go beyond their creed; although we believe that, with reference to the more pious of them, it often does so. We are not called to decide upon their case. To their own Master they stand or fall. It suffices us to entertain the conviction, that there is no Christianity without love, on our part, to a pardoning God. We know not of any method in which this can be brought into the heart except by our being assured of his love to us. But we would not, on this account, deny the Christianity of those who see this matter in a different light from ourselves. To us it must still appear, that there is an intimate connection between the doctrine of justification and the

doctrine of the witness of the Spirit;—that to preach the former without the latter, is to preach an incomplete gospel;—and that, in point of fact, the office of the Spirit, as the Spirit of adoption, lies at the foundation of experimental religion.

2. Equally close is the connection between the view of the Spirit's work for which we contend, and the correct exhibition of the new-birth or regeneration. When hearers of the gospel are directed (as we fear is not seldom the case) to seek for regeneration independently of justification, and even previously to it—independently also of adoption and previously to it—the order is inverted in which these blessings are placed before us in the Scriptures. At the hazard of being thought chargeable with a repetition of what has been before said, we must state that the Scriptural order in which justification, adoption, and regeneration, are to be contemplated, is this:—When, with an humble, penitent heart, we believe and trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ,—*that* faith is, through the boundless mercy of God, counted unto us for righteousness. It is imputed to us (*εἰς δικαιοσύνην*) for our justification. We are immediately adopted into the family of God; and the Spirit of adoption is sent into our hearts to

testify the gracious act. He, the Eternal Spirit, in revealing the Son of God as our Saviour, sheds abroad in our hearts love to a pardoning God;—and we love him from a deep and permanent persuasion of his love to us. This love of God is a new principle; and produces an entire revolution in the character. It becomes the principle of a new life; under its influence we become new creatures; we are born again; —"born, not of the will of man, but of God." John i, 13.

Thus, while our regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, and while the important change, or rather renewal, is wrought by his gracious agency, the instrumental means by which it is produced is the introduction of the love of God, as a pardoning God, into the soul. It follows, that the order in which these blessings must be placed is, first, justification, accompanied by the witness of our adoption; then, following this,—but without any intervening period of time that can be discerned,—the regeneration of the soul; this real change following immediately the relative change which has just been effected.

It is of great importance that we should keep the distinction very clearly in our minds between the relative change in justification, and the real change in the new-birth. We should

not forget that the first named of these must, in the nature of things, precede. We are not regenerated in order to the attainment of justification; but rather, we are justified in order to our being regenerated. Still further, it is needful to bear in mind that the witness of the Spirit to our adoption is the connecting link, as it were, between justification and the new-birth. The relative position in which we have now placed them is not, by any means, as appears to us, an arbitrary one; but the natural order of their occurrence. Justification is, in the order of thought, followed by adoption; and adoption introduces into our hearts the love which is the principle of the new-birth.

If this be a correct view, it must then be evident that any representation which should invert this Scriptural order would be productive of mischief. To change the relation which these gospel blessings bear to each other, (so as to teach, for instance, that the new-birth must go before justification,) would introduce great confusion into the system of Christian doctrine. This is, in fact, too frequently done. For want of holding Scriptural views, as to the believer's privilege to be assured of his sonship, the account of his regeneration is incomplete and imperfect. The views of the new-birth, as to

the amount of what is included in it, are very obscure; and the standard of the regenerate man's condition is placed much too low.

Regeneration, when it is the result of the testimony of the Spirit to our adoption, is a very honorable and elevated attainment. It is not merely a change of views;—it is not simply a conviction of sin;—it is not comprised in a mere change of purpose. It includes abundantly more than a feeling of dissatisfaction and disgust with the emptiness and frivolity of this vain world. Where these things are, it is sometimes too hastily concluded that regeneration must necessarily be. But they come far short of it. There may be even a deep sorrow for sin, a turning away from the paths of sin, and, in short, a very visible change in the whole external conduct;—and yet, all this may be very remote from a thorough, Scriptural regeneration. It ought rather, perhaps, to be classed under the head of repentance, and of fruits meet for repentance. But to represent this preparatory work of the Holy Spirit as being itself regeneration is a great and dangerous mistake. It is one, however, which, we fear, is not unfrequently committed. There are thousands, and tens of thousands, who have serious impressions of the value of religion, impressive views of the evil of sin,

and some delight in the exercises of piety, who have yet never experienced what the Scripture means by the new-birth.

For want of correct views of the work of the Spirit, in making the sense of our adoption the means of introducing the love of God into our hearts, and consequently the means of creating us anew;—for want of Scriptural views of the order and method in which the Spirit works;—there is great danger of persons taking up with a very imperfect religious experience, and supposing themselves to be regenerated, when, in point of fact, they might rather be said to have been merely convinced of their need of regeneration.

The new-birth, then, be it observed, must include *the love of a pardoning God*, as the very principle whence it takes its origin. The introduction of this into the heart is the very point from which the individual sets out, like Enoch, to walk with God. It is this which gives to all his actions an entirely new character. They are now the spontaneous developments of a newly implanted energy; and one which is of sufficient force to exhibit all the marks, and present all the evidence, of a new creation. Old things are passed away. New tastes and inclinations have been produced. New aims

and purposes have sprung up in the soul. New pursuits have now called forth the best exertion of its renewed powers; and the result of the whole is, that, as love makes the willing feet move in the paths of a new obedience, the whole man becomes pleasing to God. "But without faith" (and a faith that worketh by love) "it is impossible to please him."

Our views of the entireness and completeness of this great change—the new-birth—will therefore much depend on our holding aright the doctrine of the office of the Spirit of adoption, and on our connecting the new-birth with it as its inseparable result. It will also appear to follow, that a change so marked, so distinguished, can scarcely have occurred without leaving the remembrance of the time, the place, and the circumstances of its occurrence. We are far from laying any great stress upon this, because we see that the Scripture lays none. God works this change with great diversity as to the manner of it. He opens the heart of a Lydia gently and imperceptibly; while, in the heart of a Paul, "it pleases God to reveal his Son" with circumstances which are never to be forgotten. We lay no stress on the mere details attendant upon any man's conversion; but we speak now as to facts. Those who look upon conversion as the

consequence of the revelation of the Son of God in the heart, generally find it to be a change so great and striking, that the period of its occurrence becomes memorable during all the remainder of their pilgrimage. They are led to say with Paley, "A man might as easily forget his escape from a shipwreck."

3. After noticing the connection of the witness of the Spirit with our gratuitous justification on the one hand, and with our regeneration on the other, we may further attempt to place its importance before the view of the reader by noticing its intimate association with all real enjoyment and happiness in religion. That man was made for happiness is as certain as that he was made to glorify God. The infinitely good Being who gave us our existence has intimated to us, by the very constitution of our nature, that his will, in creating us, embraced our truest welfare; that he contemplated nothing less than our ultimate enjoyment of all the felicity of which our wondrous being is capable. The infinite benevolence of his nature, and the sentient capabilities of ours, equally demonstrate this point, on which his holy word has also set the stamp and seal of its sanction. Religion is then intended to make men happy. He who personifies her as delighting in sighs, and groans, and

voluntary pains, has mistaken her character entirely. Gloom is alien to her nature. "Fear that hath torment" she favors not.

> "Sweet peace she brings wherever she arrives;
> She builds our quiet as she forms our lives."

This point being settled, that it is in the power of religion to confer happiness; that it was intended by its Author to do so; and that, where it fails of this, it must be deemed to be either erroneous, or, at least, defective;—this being conceded, it will become very apparent how much the fulfillment of this part of the design of Christianity depends on the right understanding and experimental enjoyment of the witness of our adoption. How natural it is for the soul, in the absence of the divine favor, to languish and pine! "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" "O that I knew where I might find him!" To a contemplative and thinking mind, and especially to a pensive and serious spirit, impressed, as it ought to be, with the solemn moment of eternal things, this world will appear one vast and gloomy wilderness in the absence of the smile of God. It is only the dissipation and distraction produced by visible and temporal objects which can prevent an immortal spirit, that has any sense of reli-

gion, from feeling its loneliness while destitute of a persuasion of God's favor. And when this dissipating effect of outward things ceases, and some afflictive dispensation strikes the thought inward upon itself, and forces on the soul the consideration of its own real condition, then its utter destitution begins to be felt.

"——— 'Tis one great wilderness
This earth without my God."

Compare with this the happiness of an individual into whose heart the Spirit of God has been sent, enabling him confidently to address the Majesty of heaven with the endearing title of Father. He has emerged out of the previous darkness of guilt and condemnation, in which, perhaps, he had long lain. He is brought into the light of the divine favor, and walks in that marvelous light. How wondrous the transition! "He who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shined into his heart;" and everything in the aspect of visible nature seems to sympathize with the joyous change which has passed within him. The heavens now display the glory of God; the earth looks fair with his beauty, and the whole universe reflects his awful majesty. The adopted believer, recognized as a son of God, "sings of mercy" all the day long.

What has he now to dread, or what to regret, except, indeed, his inability to render any adequate returns for mercy like that which has been shown to him? The happiness of which he is made a partaker appears to himself to possess a solidity and permanency quite distinct from every other source of happiness which the world contains. It is full of sweet satisfaction. It is bright with visions of immortal hope. It appears exactly adapted to the wants and wishes of the immortal soul.

> "My Father, God! that gracious sound
> Dispels my guilty fear;
> Not all the harmony of heaven
> Could so delight my ear."

4. Closely connected with the observations just made is another important view:—that without a sense of our adoption into the family of God, there cannot be that confidence in approaching to him, and that filial feeling of trust and reliance, which enter deeply into the essence of experimental piety. The trust of a loving child in the kindness, wisdom, care, and fidelity of a father, is a beautiful illustration of that state of the soul toward God which believers feel who walk in the light of his countenance. But this delightful feeling of repose in the arms of infi-

nite mercy must depend upon a clear evidence of our interest in that mercy. Where the sense of unforgiven sin remains, there must be the shyness of distrust, the shrinking of fear, and the absence of that entire liberty in pleading the promises which is so delightful. How can I draw near with confidence into the presence of the heavenly King till I know that he has pardoned my numerous and flagrant rebellions? How lift up my face to the Majesty in the heavens, until that dazzling glory appears mingled with signs of forgiveness, condescension, and love? While conscience condemns, while the law utters its thunders, and while I have no inward persuasion that God has received me in mercy through the merits of his Son, I shrink and stand afar off, like the affrighted multitudes before the burning mount of Sinai. Guilt closes my mouth; and if I am not absolutely speechless, I utter but the language of lamentation and complaint.

Such is the picture which every conscious unforgiven penitent has reason to draw of himself. But how different do his feelings toward God become, when the Spirit is imparted to him "that he may know the things which are freely given to him of God!" By the new and living way, which Christ hath opened for him into the

holiest, he draws nigh in the full assurance of faith. Guilt no longer oppresses him. All fear which hath torment departs. A sense of his heavenly Father's smile produces a complete confidence in his goodness, care, and sympathy. And now the confiding child of God knows what is meant by having boldness of access,—*παρρησιαν*,—liberty of speech, in approaching to God. There is a childlike pouring out of his hopes, and fears, and desires, and aspirations, into the bosom of parental love. There is no concealment;—the child of God has nothing to conceal. God reveals to him, in his devotional approaches to the throne of grace, the secrets of his mercy, the infinity of his love, and encourages him to the exercise of that entire openness and unreserve which only such favored spirits know. O who can tell the delight which the immortal spirit feels in the persuasion that "the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity," hears with acceptance its feeblest cry,—hears it propitiously,—hears it with the feelings of a father? The privilege is of such unspeakable value, that thousands of gold and silver, or even the entire accumulated treasures of the universe, would be inadequate to set it forth. Now we cannot conceive of the possibility of its existence, but in connection with reconciliation, adoption, and the

witness of adoption. The feelings of a servant, mingled with much of fear and dread, are one thing; the feelings of a son are quite another. And in nothing will the distinction appear more strongly marked, than in the comparative confidence or distrust with which they will approach the throne of grace. "Thou art no more a servant, but a son."

5. Another consideration, which appears to demonstrate the great importance of the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, is, that it is intimately connected with all advance and progress in holiness. We do not assert that there can be absolutely no growth in grace where this testimony is not enjoyed. There are, doubtless, gracious dispositions which may strike their roots and grow in the absence of the light and vital influence of God's smile. These are, however, such gracious feelings as are experienced by all true penitents; as, contrition, and humility, and hatred of sin. But even these become more mature subsequently to our justification. Right views of the enormity of sin, and deep contrition on account of it, are experienced in a far more perfect degree by those who are conscious of their reconciliation with God, than they can be by others. It is a sight of the cross, and of the love there manifested to

poor sinful dying man, that melts the soul into deep feelings of awe, and fear, and sorrow, on account of our personal transgressions. "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, *when I am pacified toward thee.*" Ezek. xvi, 63. Now, if this be the case, even with those gracious productions of the Holy Spirit which might seem to have a special reference to a state of penitence—if it be true that a conscious assurance of reconciliation will perfect even these—still more intimate must the connection be between an inward revelation of our adoption, and the love which transforms us into the divine likeness, the gratitude which binds us to the cross, and the whole train of Christian graces which make up the New Testament idea of holiness.

All the operations of the divine Spirit upon the mind, previously to conversion, are of a preparatory character. At that period there are not, properly speaking, any advances in the divine life. The life of God in the soul of man has not yet commenced. But, together with the introduction of the love of God into the heart, as the result of his manifested love to us, there are immediately produced all the gracious dispositions of a Christian; imperfect, indeed,

many of them, and weak in their exercise; but still they are there; long-suffering, meekness, temperance, charity, with her attendant and handmaid graces—whatsoever things are true, and just, and lovely, and pure, and of good report. *There* are found, united, the tempers which adorn the Christian, the conversation which distinguishes him, the motives which actuate him, and the pure unselfish benevolence which is exhibited by the Christian alone.

In all these graces there will be an advancing, just in proportion to the degree of clearness with which the evidence is enjoyed by us, that we walk in the divine favor. Alas! in not a few Christians, they are—or at least some of these graces are—at a very low ebb. But if love grow cold—if joy and peace decline—if meekness and gentleness are exchanged for their unlovely opposites, anger and wrath—if there be a general deficiency of vitality and vigor in the external developments of the Christian spirit—we may generally conclude, with almost entire certainty, that the inward spring of holiness is wanting—that the love of a pardoning God, and the joyous walking in the light of his countenance, have been, in whole or in part, forfeited.

But let the soul obtain, and continue clearly

to enjoy, a sense of God's forgiving love; and then the transformation of all its powers into the divine likeness regularly and progressively advances. It is cheered and invigorated by beholding the unclouded beams of the Sun of righteousness. It gazes with wonder, and awe, and adoring love, on what the bleeding cross has purchased, and on what infinite bounty has bestowed; and, while it dwells on the revealed love of God, it is changed into the same image. It is brought near to God, and feels the effect of that nearness. It communes habitually with God, and feels the effect of that exalted communion. Meet and right it now appears to be, that all the powers of the soul should be devoted to God—that the dedication should be entire—that the consecration should be complete. The understanding contemplates the revealed wonders of redemption; the memory dwells on them; the affections are divinely regulated, and rest in the love of God with sweet complacency; and the soul longs to sound all the depths of that solemn declaration, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people; and the power by which they advance

to still higher attainments, results, in great measure, from the invigorating influence of their heavenly Father's smile. In this happy state of conscious reconciliation, nothing seems impossible to them. The soul feels as though lifted up on the wings of eagles, above the power of temptation. Victory over sin, in all its assaults, it is enabled uniformly to obtain; and thus the happy child of God goes on to mortify, and ultimately to abolish, the whole body of sin. And now his language is, "Not as though I had already attained. I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

6. The witness of adoption is further productive of entire submission to our heavenly Father's will; and, so intimate is the connection between them, that it appears doubtful whether submission to the divine disposals can subsist in any mature degree, except in those who happily realize their filial relationship to God.

There are times and seasons in the experience of all believers, when this grace, above all others, will be put to a severe trial. There will be times when their own wills must be renounced, and they will be called to forego their

most cherished purposes; times when they will be necessitated to bow to such decisions of divine wisdom as are not only attended with pain, but also involved in much mystery. The present is a suffering state, and the people of God are not exempted from the common lot. Diseases, more or less severe, may assail this feeble earthly frame, and they may be called, not unfrequently, to endure extreme pain. Then, at times, the corruptible body presses down the mind, and causes painful musings and dark apprehensions. Domestic afflictions press heavily upon them; and, in the transaction of this world's business, losses, and crosses, the distant apprehension, or the actual approach, of "poverty as an armed man," may sink their spirits down."

Now, in times like these, the value of a comfortable assurance that we are the children of God is delightfully felt. Nothing but this can enable us steadily to look affliction in the face without dismay. If we have reason to view it as a sign of divine displeasure, and as a chastisement of our folly and rebellion,—affliction then becomes an object of real terror. O never may it be the lot of my reader to look on affliction as the stroke of His rod, into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall!

But though "many are the afflictions" of the children of God, they are all deprived of their sting. Their character is entirely changed, and they are viewed as proofs and instances of unbounded love. Within the compass of human thought there cannot be a consideration so adapted to sustain the soul in suffering, as the reflection that the cup of affliction, though bitter to the taste, is mingled by a Father's hand. It is far beyond a mere conviction of the judgment that all is well governed in the universe. For it is, in addition, a right state of the heart toward him who, while he rules all worlds by his supreme authority, is the Friend and Father of his people. It can produce, therefore, a delightful acquiescence of the soul in the rectitude, and in the benevolence, of dispensations the most painful. "What would you do, madam," said a minister to a pious and afflicted lady, "What would you do, if the Lord should refer it to you to choose, in this sickness, whether you should live or die?" The answer was, "Truly, I believe I should again refer it to him to choose for me."

But where the submission required is not to the endurance of pining sickness, or domestic affliction, but to such occurrences in providence as cross our wills, or thwart our purposes, even

there submission is only to be found in the persuasion that we, and all our affairs, are in a Father's hand. The testimony of the Spirit, assuring us of our filial relationship to God, and producing entire confidence in his paternal love, enables us to say, "*Make me what thou wilt.* Make me a vessel for thy service, more or less honorable. I am content if I may but be employed for thee. *Place me where thou wilt*— in a higher or a lower station; for, in the heavenly family, all places are honorable. *Use me as thou wilt.* Although the employment may not be precisely that to which my heart would most incline, it must, if it be thy choice, and not my own, be best for me." Here the foundation of all true submission to the divine will, and consequently of all real contentment with our earthly lot, is laid. Here the repinings of our restless nature are hushed; and, if we cannot have exactly the things we wish, we may, at least, refer it to the infinite wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father to choose for us, where we are conscious of our inability to choose for ourselves.

"With steadfast mind thy course of duty run;
God nothing does, nor suffers to be done,
But thou wouldst do the same, if thou couldst see
The end of all events, as well as He."

7. Closely connected with this disposition of mind, which has reference to our present lot, is another, which refers to our anticipation of the future. No man will be able to look forward, with calm confidence, to what may be in futurity, unless he is persuaded, on the one hand, that there exists an almighty and all-wise Governor of events; and, on the other hand, that this almighty Being is his father and his friend. It will not be sufficient to know, as a general proposition, that God is wise, or that he is good. This may be perfectly true, and yet my happiness may not thereby be insured. The great question must still return—Is he good to me? Have I an interest in his bounty and love, by standing in a filial relation to him? An affirmative answer to this question can alone set my heart at rest, in looking forward into the profound obscurity of coming years.

For, not unfrequently, the aspect of the future is dark and gloomy. It is always a vast unknown; involving the most portentous events; and sure to bring forth more wonderful and more painful results than are comprehended in the widest grasp of conjecture. O blindness to the future! How wisely and how graciously are the secrets of futurity hidden from man! Even the dim shadow which coming events cast be-

fore them is sufficient to quell the stoutest heart, if it be not supported by confidence in the paternal love of God. But the conviction, "My Father's at the helm," silences every fear. The time to come, as well as the present, is equally in his hands. The solemn future, with all its undiscovered secrets, with all its unknown cares, and trials, and pains, lies open to his view; and is even now arranged and ordered, in weight and measure. Wherever my future path may lie, (such is the language of faith,) "I cannot go where universal love smiles not around." "He shall choose our inheritance for us," is the determination of those who have confidence in his fatherly love; who know that his choice is best; and whose past experience teaches them that it is much safer to leave the direction of our path in his hands than to take it into our own. If our lot in life be of his ordering and appointing, with as little as possible of human choice in it, whatever unexpected trials may hereafter attend it, we shall feel confidence that it is working for our good. As to the future, (may the believer say,) it will probably be very much as the past has been, a varied scene of joy and sorrow. Much of mercy will be mingled with it; and days of happiness, I would fain believe, are yet in reserve for me. But I wish

not to conceal from myself, even if it were possible, that should my days be prolonged, there are before me at one time disappointed hopes, at another, the loss of endeared relatives; I cannot hope to escape the languors of sickness, and the weakness of declining age. But all these things are in the hands of a Father, whose love toward me has been great at every step of my past life, and who will not forsake me at its last and closing period. "We are saved by hope."

8. We may further remark, that the persuasion of our heavenly Father's love is everything to us in point of obedience, as it is in point of comfort. The spring of all acceptable service rendered to God is *love*. There is a wide distinction (as was remarked by one of the Greek fathers long ago) between the obedience of a servant who serves his master from fear, and that of another servant who is actuated by sincere love and a sense of obligation. From fear only so much of service will proceed as dare not be withheld. But love thinks it can never do enough. Fear will render service so long as the master's eye is upon him;—not equally so when that eye is withdrawn. But love acts from nobler principles; and renders not eye-service. Fear will labor very imperfectly at

best; as must be the case where there is no will to work. But love is a motive of great power, a spring that never relaxes, an energy that never tires. Fear is a negative power; and may in its best estate go so far as to restrain from the commission of evil; but love alone prompts to the vigorous performance of what is good. Its language is,—

> "Too much to thee I cannot give,
> Too much I cannot do for thee;
> Let all thy love, and all thy grief,
> Graven on my heart for ever be."

As it appears, then, that love to God is absolutely necessary to all efficient and energetic obedience, we shall see who are the characters that are adapted to do good service in the church, and to promote the cause of the Redeemer in the world. They are those who have received the testimony of the Spirit of adoption; who have a sense of God's love to them; and who love him in return with a truly filial love. "The joy of the Lord is their strength," to labor for him; and inspires them with almost more than mortal vigor. The love of God is the noblest motive that can actuate an immortal being; and at the same time it is the most powerful. It counts all labors light. It calls forth, in those who are the subjects of it, the

whole of their mental and physical energies in the divine service; and, while the love of burning seraphim dwells in their bosoms, they imitate, in labors more abundant, the cherubim "who excel in strength." Or, if an infirm state of bodily health, or other insuperable impediment, should render this untiring activity impossible, still their labors, although less in amount, yet proceeding from that pure motive which is entirely approved by the great Master of all, will be accepted, smiled upon, and rendered useful, far beyond more splendid external services which spring not from filial love. For what are outward services to God, if the pure principle of love to himself, the infinite object of all love, be absent?

Even the eloquence of an angel, giving utterance to the sublimest sentiments; or, on the other hand, mental and physical energies which should leave all mortal prowess behind;—all this, exerted in his service, would be nothing to him, if love were wanting. But services which proceed from this heavenly principle, although, by circumstances, they may be restricted and limited in their amount, he will delight to own and accept. They are done, so far as the principle of them is concerned, even as his "will is done in heaven." They may be the services of

little children, of young men who have not attained their strength, or of aged men who have passed the period of active exertion. But the filial love from which they proceed gives them their acceptableness with God. He "seeth not as man seeth." He looks on the heart; and estimates the value of the work from the character of the workman.

Thus, all the views we can take of this matter tend directly to show us how intimate is the connection between the witness of the Spirit and every part of vital religion. It connects itself with all the graces of the Spirit, and is instrumental in their production. It is the spring of all the deep and heartfelt happiness of the Christian believer; leads him on to continual growth in grace; inspires him with a confidence in all his heavenly Father's present dealings with him; teaches him to trust for the future; and, as the result of the whole, adds wings to his speed in doing the will of his Father in heaven. A possession which is thus associated with every right feeling, with all true comfort, and, indeed, with all that is vital in experimental and practical religion, must be of the greatest possible importance in the Christian life: and it must be for the interest and happiness of all to enjoy it permanently, and without

the least obscuration or interruption. To this point the reader's attention will be invited in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVIDENCE OF ADOPTION, CONSIDERED IN ITS DEGREES OF CLEARNESS.

When first the soul emerges out of the darkness of "the horrible pit;"—when, after a long night of sorrow, and fear, and almost despair, it receives, through the Spirit of adoption, the happy assurance of God's forgiving love,—the evidence is usually so bright and clear as to be without a cloud. If it be suddenly imparted, (as is not unfrequently the case,) it is the more joyous, and approaches the nearer to a feeling of ecstasy. For, to experience such a transition cannot but be associated with the liveliest emotions. These sensations of rapture, however, must be expected to decline in their intensity; for nothing that lifts up humanity so much above itself can ordinarily be permanent. Yet, so long as the believer walks with God in a calm and untroubled course of duty, he retains

the joyous sense of his acceptance undiminished as to any of its essential qualities.

It is not, however, to be inferred that the evidence is uniform, as to the degrees of its clearness. One man may possess a more joyous and permanent testimony of his acceptance than his Christian brother, whose piety, at the same time, may be equally undoubted with his own. There is often something in the character of the individual mind, and still more in the circumstances connected with the mode in which the believer first obtained, and still retains, his piety, which has great influence here. There may even be in the experience of the same individual very considerable diversity; as all experience shows. There may be times of brighter, and of less clear, manifestations of the love of God; all which variations are, doubtless, regulated by benevolent laws, which are only in a very imperfect degree revealed to us. In certain cases, that bright unclouded light which, we have said, breaks often suddenly upon the mind of the anxious penitent, and, for a time, banishes every doubt and every fear, may suffer a very painful obscuration. There may be reasons, partially known and partially concealed, why it diminishes in its clearness, declining gradually till, like the last ray of twilight when

the dying day expires, it totally disappears. On the other hand, where the communication of the Holy Spirit's witness is gradual and imperceptible, (a case not altogether unknown, though of rare occurrence,) the first faint ray of the morning twilight may illustrate the earliest commencement of the inward testimony; and the gradual increase of light, still advancing till it arrives at the meridian hour of perfect illumination, may represent the progress of the soul toward the full assurance of faith.

Between these two points, however, of total darkness on the one hand, and of meridian brightness on the other, as many intermediate degrees may probably exist in the spiritual experience of a Christian, as in the illumination of the natural world. Some of the causes which may diminish, or wholly exclude, the enjoyment of this inestimable blessing; and further, some of the means which conduce to its continued and growing clearness, it will be the object of this short chapter to unfold.

1. It may be forfeited and lost by any act of flagrant unfaithfulness to God. Sin is so incompatible with it, that any transgression of the Redeemer's royal law interrupts it; and, in place of the celestial light of God's favor, brings darkness into the soul. It does this, indeed, in

different degrees. A clear and wide distinction is made in Scripture between sins of surprise and those of deliberate and cherished purpose. A man, according to St. Paul, (Gal. vi, 1,) may be overtaken in a fault. Sudden and unexpected temptation may surprise him, and repentance may immediately succeed his fall without the intervention of a moment. Such persons, according to the above inspired authority, are to be restored to the church; and from this we may safely infer, that there is a gracious disposition on God's part to restore them to his favor. Both the privileges just named—the favor of God, and union with his church—are forfeited by any open transgression whatsoever. But, when the character of the temptation has been such that the transgressor has appeared to be an object of pity rather than of severe censure, it seems evident that God often restores the humbled penitent, before long time has elapsed, to the joy of his salvation.

It is, however, seldom that the extenuation can be pleaded on the part of him who has been surprised into sin, that no previous fault, or negligence, or omission of the requisite foresight had exposed him to the fall. Sin has, it is true, different degrees of enormity; but even in its lightest aspect it is a very fearful thing. Often

it brings upon the soul an entire and palpable darkness ;—"a darkness that may be felt;"—and out of which he who has again been plunged into that dreadful gloom finds it most difficult to emerge. What days and nights of mourning after an absent God are the lot of him whose faith has, perhaps, in one moment, suffered a total eclipse! More difficult by far does it seem to recover what, by unfaithfulness, has been foolishly cast away, than it was to obtain it at the first. This may appear to be, in part, a natural consequence. The unfaithful soul cannot forget its unfaithfulness. It feels a shy distrust in approaching to the mercy-seat. The remembrance of abused mercy presses it down, and prevents a vigorous and believing application for a renewed act of pardon. And partly, these long nights of sorrowful lamenting over its fallen condition before it can be restored, must be looked upon often as a judicial chastisement. They are intended to be admonitory to all who witness them, and to the individual himself, that he sin no more against the law of liberty and love.

2. But secret and concealed unfaithfulness also, some sin of the heart as well as some transgression in the life, may dim the brightness of the celestial evidence; and may cause it to decline until it entirely disappears. "Grieve not

the Holy Spirit of God," says the apostle, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." By this mode of speaking, the intimation is plainly given, that the Holy Spirit deals with us as rational and accountable creatures; that the state of our hearts toward him is constantly under his inspection; and that he is as surely grieved by wrong tempers and unchristian dispositions, inwardly indulged, as by an outward act of iniquity admitted into the life. Whenever, therefore, the Christian finds his evidence of the divine favor less bright and cheering, let him search for the cause of this declension; for, a cause there is somewhere in existence. His heart has probably departed, in some respects, from the living God. "If I indulge iniquity in my heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." The affections, for instance, may fix upon improper and sinful objects; or they may be placed on lawful objects in an improper degree. There may be in the soul inordinate desires after creaturely happiness, amounting to the sin of spiritual idolatry; for they involve a rejection of God as the supreme good. Wrong tempers, as unkindness, peevishness, and a host of others, tend also to obscure the light of heaven; for the Holy Spirit, whose emblem is the gentle dove, will not communi-

cate himself unto, nor have any fellowship with, a soul in which these unlovely and unchristian tempers dwell. All the irascible passions especially, such as the explosions of anger, the pinings of envy, the cherished feelings of a hatred which refuses to forgive, seem more immediately opposed to the enjoyment of a clear sense of God's favor; for, as he is the God of love, he will only dwell in, and reveal himself to, a loving soul.

Thus the state of the heart toward God may exercise a continual though secret influence upon the degree of clearness with which the Spirit of God bears his testimony to our sonship; and we ought to deprecate above all things, and most carefully to watch against, such a departure from God as might induce the sacred Spirit altogether to withdraw his comfortable and cheering presence from us.

3. But where the believer may not be able to find, in either outward or inward acts of *transgression*, the cause of the diminution or withdrawal of the Spirit's favorable testimony, let him examine whether *omission* may not be the source of a calamity so deeply to be deplored. The omission of plain and acknowledged duty,—negligence of the means of grace,—the restraining of prayer before God,—all or either of these

may be quite sufficient to bring again a darkness upon the mind. The man who (to use a Scripture phrase) "does not stir up himself to call upon God," may thereby give evidence that he does not rightly estimate the privileges of sonship, and the unspeakable value of the knowledge of salvation. He grieves the Spirit, by showing himself insensible to the infinite kindness and condescension of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of adoption; who comes and makes his abode in the human heart, in order that the soul may be assured of its interest in the great atonement. With what feelings of solemnity and awe, on our part, ought his presence with us to be marked! How grateful should we be for such an undeserved favor! how humble under a sense of our unworthiness of it! and especially how careful to cultivate that communion with the Holy Trinity which is so necessary to a uniform and comfortable walking in the light! The soul needs, for the preservation of its peace, as well as for the strengthening of its energies, all the aid and succor it can derive from the means of grace; and in this respect many believers are wanting to their own best interests. There is too little communing with God. They do not "cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart." No slight excuses should induce us to

deprive ourselves of the communion of saints. All temptation to neglect the book of God, for any profitless and trivial reading, should be steadily resisted. Negligence and omission, in reference to these self-evident duties, will cause a languor of the soul. The lamps of even the wise virgins, if neglected, will burn but dim. The state of the soul will no longer be, by any means, satisfactory; but days of doubt and gloom will alternate with occasional glimpses of hope. The full, and clear, and abiding evidence of God's love will be wanting; and, unless the soul be aroused to a vigorous discharge of duty, all its fair prospects, and cheering hopes, may be permanently and fearfully eclipsed.

4. A relapsing into a defective exercise of faith may produce a similar result. The eye of the soul must be fixed on the one great object of confidence,—the atoning death of the Saviour. Everything that comes between our mind and this glorious object,—everything that diverts our attention from it, in whole or in part,—is sure to prove injurious to our peace. Experience may have taught us this; and, certainly, if we have seen much of the dealings of God with others, observation must have confirmed it.

Interesting cases of religious experience have come under our notice, where there has been

great darkness of the soul, which it appeared somewhat difficult to account for. The persons in whom it occurred were exemplary in every external duty,—diligent in the use of the means of grace,—apparently conscientious in every part of their deportment,—and much in earnest to be safe and right in reference to eternity. But still they had not peace with God. They did not realize their interest in the atonement. The Spirit did not bear witness with their spirit, that they were the children of God; and if they had, at some previous period, enjoyed a degree of comfort in the persuasion of their adoption, that comfort had departed. Their concern about their spiritual state was, at the same time, deep and painful; and they would have done or endured anything, if they might but once more have beheld the light of God's reconciled countenance. If, at first view, their case appeared puzzling, and involved in some degree of mystery, we have probably found, on a more minute inspection, what was its hidden cause. They were not chargeable with acts of transgression; nor with neglect of any known duty. But their view had, some how or other, been withdrawn from Christ. Something had *come between them and the Saviour;* so that while they acknowledged, in general, the doctrine of the atone-

ment, the eye of their soul, so to speak, was by no means exclusively fixed on the cross, as the sole ground of acceptance.

It is marvelous, (and perhaps can only be accounted for as a device of Satan,) that there should be so many things which secretly tend to hide Christ from our view; and, therefore, to diminish and obscure the joy of faith. The believer may so dwell upon his sad defects, and on the remaining maladies of his soul, as to expend on these that amount of contemplation which, if directed simply to the Saviour, would have brought immediate healing. This is as though an Israelite should have sat down, and counted, over and over again, the wounds received from the fiery serpents, (as an old writer says,) instead of looking off from himself to that emblem of the Saviour which Moses had lifted up. Or, at other times, the means of grace, however excellent and necessary in themselves, instead of leading us directly to Christ, in which all their value consists, may, through our mistake, lead us away from him. We may be looking to receive from prayer, from hearing the word, from sacraments, that for which we ought simply to look to Christ's meritorious death and passion.

Or, we live and walk too much by our feel-

ings, and too little by faith. Now, those feelings may possibly be influenced by merely natural causes. Joyous sensations, which have more of earth in them than heaven, may lead to the indulgence of the most entire confidence. But then, in the same degree, that confidence will be liable to be depressed by a natural sinking of the spirits; and may give place to doubt, or even despondency. There may, at the same time, it is easy to conceive, be as little real ground for the confidence, on the one hand, as for the despair on the other. In order to be entirely free from all danger of misleading us, our feelings must have constant reference to Christ. In other words, they must be the result of faith, and not be put in the place of it. Or again, we may experience a diminution of the celestial light of assurance by losing sight of the freeness of the gift of justification. Our view may be taken off from the exclusive contemplation of the Saviour; and we may again, though quite unconsciously, begin to look, in a greater or less degree, to something in ourselves, as the ground of our acceptance. Let us never forget that (to use a significant word of the great apostle) "God justifieth the ungodly." It is, indeed, upon his believing in Jesus, that God does this. But still that penitent seeker of sal-

vation continues to be, up to the very moment of his free justification, exclusively and only an ungodly person. There is not found in him any reason,—no, not the most remote,—drawn from any consideration of what he is, or of what he has done,—that could bring down on him the divine favor. It is rather the absolute renouncing of all these grounds of confidence which prepares him for the exercise of saving faith. He is not justified because he is humble, or diligent, or prayerful: but simply, because he flies from every other ground of trust, and confides alone in the atoning death of Christ. Everything, therefore, which takes off the soul from the simplicity of this trusting in the atonement, obscures, in the same degree, the "full assurance of faith," and "the full assurance of hope;" and the witness of the Spirit becomes less and less distinct, till it is in danger of disappearing altogether.

Now, while there are, on the one hand, as we have shown, a multitude of things, whose influence is altogether unfavorable and adverse to a clear and permanent enjoyment of the divine witness of our sonship—so, on the other hand, it will not be difficult to demonstrate, that there are other dispositions of mind, and modes of conduct, which are eminently conducive to

the permanence and clearness of this testimony.

1. Nothing, perhaps, leads more directly to it than purity of intention. The promise of the Saviour to every disciple—that "if his eye be single, his whole body shall be full of light"—must be understood to insure to sincerity and simplicity, wherever found, inward direction on all that concerns our eternal interests. The light promised is divine light. It is the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It accomplishes other purposes, indeed, besides directing the believer to right conclusions as to his spiritual state. But this it does accomplish among the rest. It is the light of the divine favor shining into his soul, and filling it with happiness. At the same time, we learn from the Saviour, that the proposition may be reversed. If the eye of the soul be not single—if the intention (which is to the soul what the eye is to the body) be not pure—if the man is aiming at anything low, selfish, worldly, or creaturely, instead of aiming simply to glorify God—the perceptions of his soul are more or less obscured. Dimness, or even darkness, is the result. The sense of seeing, spiritually understood, is not in a right and transparent

(*απλους*) state; and the light of heaven cannot shine through.

This one consideration may, in no small measure, account for the diversities of religious experience in different individuals; and even in the same individual, at different stages of his pilgrimage. The evidence of the divine favor will be influenced in its clearness by the cause which we are now adverting to; and this cause will be incessant in its operation. There will be, in our purposes and aims, unless we are watchful, certain divergencies from that entire purity of intention, through which alone, as a lucid medium, the soul can contemplate God. If, on the other hand, we exercise due watchfulness and self-inspection, these departures from simplicity and sincerity of purpose will be avoided. The result will be in exact correspondence with the keeping of the heart diligently. To aim at nothing but the divine glory—to desire nothing but God—to delight in nothing but as it leads to God—is a high and blessed attainment; and the nearer we approach to it, the more sure will be our enjoyment of the unclouded evidence of the divine favor.

2. Next to the intention of the soul—the occupation of its intellectual powers demands

our care. For on this, too, in no small degree, will depend the clearness of the divine witness of our acceptance. It becomes an important inquiry,—On what is the mind habitually engaged? On what matters does it dwell? What, in the ordinary current of its thoughts, is most generally passing through it? Not much penetration is requisite to perceive that it must be of the highest moment to employ the mind in meditation upon the word of God; and so to *preoccupy* it with those divine communications, that trifles may not usurp the inward sanctuary of the soul—that all erroneous principles especially may be excluded—and that the mind may become imbued, as it were, with the heavenly influence which pervades the volume of inspiration.

In that divine book God speaks to man—speaks to him on matters of infinite importance; and especially speaks to him all those things which, being believed, and received into the soul, conduce to its peace, and to the persuasion of its safety. The intimate connection between the inward testimony of the Spirit, and the external testimony of the inspired word of God, is evident. The Spirit testifies that which the word testifies. There can be no discrepancy between them. So far we agree with many of those who oppose the doctrine of

the direct witness of adoption. According to them, the Spirit speaks in the word. So also we teach; but we go somewhat further, and say that he speaks also to the heart of the believer. We take care to avoid the error into which we think these our brethren fall. For they, dropping out of their view the work of the Spirit altogether, would have it to be understood, that the written word, and that only, testifies that we are the children of God; thus making the word everything, and the Spirit nothing. We, on the other hand, believe and teach, that the testimony given by the word is only then adapted to afford us comfort, when the Spirit speaks, (as he often does,) through this medium, to the heart. What the word testifies generally, the Spirit applies particularly. The word announces, as a general truth, that all believers are the sons of God. But the Spirit reveals this as an individual privilege; and enables the believer to utter the language of filial confidence, crying, Abba, Father. The word declares that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man. The truth is there—set forth with the utmost clearness, in the infallible word of God. But the illumination of the Spirit is necessary to enable me to see and feel my own interest in it.

"'Tis thine the blood t' apply,
And give us eyes to see;
Who did for every sinner die,
Hath surely died for me.

"Then, only then, we feel
Our interest in his blood;
And cry, with joy unspeakable,
Thou art *my* Lord, *my* God."

But, as the connection between the testimony of the Spirit in the word, and the testimony of the same divine Spirit in the heart, is such, that the one is the truth stated generally, and the other, the truth particularly applied; it will follow, that the word of God ought to be very dear to us. It must be eminently conducive to our enjoyment of the blessing of assurance, that we should, in our inmost souls, devoutly meditate on the sayings of that holy book; and that the word of Christ should dwell in us richly. A Christian, who, by patient study, becomes thoroughly conversant with his Bible, usually possesses a superior stability of character. There is, in comparison with others, more of uniformity in his religious experience. He is less subject to variation in his enjoyments and in his hopes. He is not, this hour, unduly elevated, and, the next hour, unduly depressed;—now too high, and presently too low;—but the

current of his peace runs smoothly, calmly, and without obstructions. "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord; and therein doth he meditate day and night."

3. Converse with God, in solemn prayer, is also an essential condition of walking in the light of his countenance. To restrain prayer before God is to incur the certain forfeiture of the joys of adoption. In effect, it cuts off the intercourse between earth and heaven; and nothing but darkness can be expected to ensue. If we are duly impressed with the value of the comfort derived from the witness of the Spirit, we shall ask and plead for it earnestly. The desire to see, without an interposing cloud, the approving countenance of our heavenly Father, and the delight of conversing with him who is now become our reconciled parent, will bring us very frequently to the throne of his heavenly grace. "Prayer," it has been said, "is the vital breath of every new-born soul." It is plainly the condition of continued and increasing life; the test by which inward piety is ascertained; and the infallible means by which it is increased.

Even in those cases where this evidence of the paternal love of God in its first communication may be defective, and dimly discerned—

like the first faint streak of the light of the morning—there is yet the utmost certainty, that if the Christian continue instant in prayer for this very thing, his views will soon become more clear, and his persuasion of his relationship to God abundantly more cheering. One doubt after another will be dissolved, until he dwells in the unclouded brightness of the divine favor.

Experience will testify, that it has been generally so with the saints of God. When they have lived very near to him, and have been diligent in the duty of secret prayer, their evidence of the adopting love of God has been most satisfactory. Entering into their closet, and praying to their Father in heaven,—they have experienced the promised reward. If there have been, in our experience, seasons when the light of heaven has shined more permanently, and more clearly than at other times, into our souls, they have usually been seasons which have followed devout and fervent communion with God. Perhaps we may assert, by a similar appeal to experience, that the reverse is equally true; and that, when believers have failed to maintain this secret intercourse with their heavenly Father, their evidence of his love has been, in a corresponding degree, obscured. When, therefore, doubts and fears

begin to prevail, and the Christian no longer sees with clearness his interest in the promises of the covenant of mercy, it will be well for him, among other searchings of the heart, to inquire whether the duties of the closet have been discharged with fervor and frequency. If he should find a defect here, he will have made an important discovery, of which he must immediately avail himself to correct what is amiss. But, even if he sees no reason to conclude that he has been chargeable with marked neglect of the duty of secret communing with God, he will still do well to stir up himself to a yet more fervent pleading of the promises. It is the most effectual means of securing a happier state of mind. Prayer, persevered in, can disperse the darkest cloud that ever enveloped a human spirit; except, perhaps, in cases of physical and nervous indisposition, where "the corruptible body presses down the soul." And it is by no means certain, that these cases of constitutional melancholy would be proof against the efficacy of prayer, if the afflicted individual could be prevailed upon to try perseveringly its utmost power. Prayer, to use a striking Scriptural phrase, "lays hold on the strength" of God; claims the help of omnipotence; and raises the soul above the dark vapors which, rising from

earth, becloud these lower skies. God uniformly honors with peculiar manifestations of himself, a spirit that gives evidence of prizing his favor more than life ;—and the degree of clearness in the testimony of the Spirit, it may be generally asserted, will be in proportion as the soul, in solemn, secluded, and devout prayer, draws near to God.

4. Another precaution,—and one which will prove of great assistance to every one who wishes (as all must wish) to retain a clear sense of the divine favor,—will be found in the communion of saints. To have frequent intercourse with Christians who are strong in faith, and lively in grace,—which is at once a privilege and duty,—will have great influence upon our own characters and feelings. There may, indeed, be persons of a peculiarly quiet and shrinking disposition of mind, who may seem to cultivate piety most successfully in retirement and comparative solitude. But usually, the communion with each other, which the divine Founder of Christianity has established as the rule and order of his disciples, will be found not only adapted, but necessary, to their retaining the life and the comforts of his religion in their souls. The Christian, shut out from the fellowship of saints, often feels faint and low in his

religious enjoyments. His soul dwells alone, and is solitary ;—" as a sparrow, upon the house-top ;"—feels the want of the cheering presence and prayers of his fellow worshipers ; and, not unfrequently, experiences some diminution of that joy of the Lord which is the strength of his people. Even when this seclusion of the Christian is involuntary and inevitable,—when sickness, distance, or lawful engagements withdraw him from those social acts of worship in which he has delighted,—he cannot but feel their loss. And although his absence from these means of grace may involve no blame, as they are not the result of his choice, yet will his soul lose, in some degree, the clearness of its views of God, and the consolatory sense of its interest in his promises. In a still greater degree may this be expected to take place, when believers unwisely deprive themselves of the benefits to be derived from mutual Christian intercourse and prayer. Amidst the crowd of harassing events we meet with in this disordered world,—where everything tends to give to sensible objects a predominance over faith,—the soul feels its need of all the counteracting influences derivable from communion with our Christian brethren. We need their counsels. We need their prayers. We need the reviving effect which is produced

on us while we converse with those who are animated with the same hopes, and aspiring after the same heaven. We shall usually find that we are in the happiest state of mind,—and that our evidence of God's love to us is the most cheering and bright,—when our faith is strengthened, and our love kindled into holy ardor, by a union of spirit with believers mighty in faith, and ardent in their love to God.

5. To sum up the whole—we may say, in general, that whatever we have found, by experience, to minister to the increase of our faith, is, just in the same degree, conducive to the enjoyment of a clear and delightful evidence of the divine favor. Faith, according to the view which we have already taken of it, is the immediate condition of our acceptance. This grace may also exist in different degrees;—may be weak or strong;—may be "*little faith*," like that of Peter sinking beneath the waves; or "*great faith*," like that of the Syrophenician woman, in her persevering application to the Saviour. Moreover, in its strength or weakness, in its augmentation or decline, it must needs have a very considerable effect upon the views, and hopes, and happiness of the soul. It, therefore, becomes a matter of the highest moment, that we should embrace all the means of

obtaining an increase of faith, considered in the light of a simple confiding trust in the Saviour;—an augmentation of that principle to which the promise of the Spirit of adoption is made.

A view to this should direct us in the choice of our reading; as it is obvious, how great is the influence of the recorded views and feelings of the eminently pious, to encourage us in the exercise of a faith like theirs. In like manner, a view to the increase of our faith should guide us in the choice of our companions. Our delight should be in the excellent of the earth; in those who live near to God, and walk in the light of his countenance. Their spirit will influence ours; and such as those with whom we most frequently associate, shall we ourselves usually be. With the same end in view, we shall be led to occupy our minds with the all-important objects of faith; to dwell on the wonders of redemption; to meditate on the promises; to direct our eye to the cross; and to Him who, on that cross, offered the all-atoning sacrifice. To dwell upon these objects of faith, is the most direct way to have faith itself increased.

We shall, moreover, find by experience, that there are many things in this sinful world which

have a continual tendency to diminish this grace of faith in us; to obscure our spiritual vision; and to deaden our impressions of the supreme importance of eternal things. Let it be laid down, and well established in our minds, as an incontrovertible maxim, that, however fair its aspect may be, or however sweet its enjoyment, —anything which produces in our minds a diminution of faith, is an unmixed and perilous evil—a thing to be deprecated and shunned with the most careful vigilance. On the other hand, our own experience will have taught us, that there are certain employments and engagements which are eminently conducive to the improvement and increase of faith in the soul; and in those engagements and employments of our time, or tongue, or talents, or influence, we shall find it our highest wisdom to be occupied. Indeed, the right use of the *prudential* means of grace is very intimately connected with the prosperity and vitality of religion in the soul. By using the term "prudential," we wish to be understood to signify, all those means of spiritual improvement, which, although not instituted nor appointed by God, have yet been found by us conducive to the increase of our faith and piety. Now, it is evident, that the *instituted* means—

as prayer, and the hearing of the word, and the assembling together in the name of Christ—stand first in point of obligation. From the observance of these, nothing but an insuperable hinderance can release us. Still it is quite possible that, in subordination to the instituted ordinances of God, there may be additional means of quickening and increasing our faith, and of augmenting our spiritual comfort, which we may wisely and prudently adopt. Their very title shows us, that prudence must dictate to us which of these we should select; and how far we should use them. As they are not divinely appointed, we must not suffer ourselves to be brought under the power of a superstitious observance of them. Yet many have found, for example, the spiritual advantage of keeping a record of God's dealings with them; or of observing particular days of humiliation and prayer; or of entering solemnly, and in secret, into covenant with God. To him who is much in earnest to walk in the clearest light of the divine favor, none of these things, which tend to secure so important a blessing, will appear indifferent.

A believer must have made but an imperfect use of his powers of observation, if he has not

perceived, in passing through some years of experience, what things they were that did injury to his spiritual interests, by diminishing the clearness with which he beheld the reconciled face of God. He must have failed in the duty of self-observation, if, on the other hand, he has not noted down in his memory what things have tended to brighten that evidence, and to give him a clearer perception of his relation to God, as his heavenly Father. Now, these lessons, which he has been learning by long, and sometimes, perhaps, painful experience, let us suppose him to reduce to practice. As he walks more closely with God, his light will arise out of obscurity, and break forth as the morning. He will find that, as he lives near to God, watches over his own spirit, keeps the door of his lips, converses with spiritual things, believes the promises, stirs up his soul to call upon God, and shows, in general, that he gives to religion that first place in his heart which it claims, just in the same proportion the light of God's countenance will shine upon him, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost will be poured into his heart. And thus is this evidence of sonship capable of still augmented clearness, until the believer dwells as it were in the suburbs of heaven, and the "full assurance of faith" can

only admit of one further advance—the consummation of the whole—when faith itself shall be

> "lost in sight;
> And hope in full supreme delight,
> And everlasting love."

CHAPTER VIII.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

As we wish to consider the subject of this treatise in every point of view in which it can be contemplated, we would not altogether overlook the objections which the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit has at various times encountered. Some of these have arisen from mistaken apprehensions of what those who hold the doctrine really believe and teach. And, as they have their origin in mistake, such objections, we may naturally suppose, will cease, as soon as the mind of the objector is set right in reference to the points which he had misapprehended. Others of the objections, however, have been directed against our interpretation of some of the passages of Scripture, on which we have supposed the doctrine to be immovably based, and involve a real difference of

opinion in reference to the privilege on which we have treated.

At a very early period after Mr. Wesley commenced his career of usefulness, in the year 1747, he was engaged in controversy with an unknown correspondent, who was evidently a dignitary of the Church of England, and probably no other than the archbishop of Canterbury himself.* If this were, however, the title of the individual who began the contest, he preserved his incognito, and made no discovery of himself; passing in all his letters to Mr. Wesley under the very common name of John Smith. Six letters, on each side, passed between them; and the controversy turned, in great measure, on the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, which Mr. Wesley had now, for some years, taught, and which he had recently stated and defended in his first sermon on that subject, and in the two Appeals. The archbishop, (if such he were,) when pressed on the point, took refuge in the supposition, that the witness of the Spirit to a believer's adoption was the privilege of the early period of Christianity, but one which ceased with the first age of the church, like the power of working miracles.

* For the correspondence, see Moore's Life of Wesley, vol. ii, 397–480. See also Wesley's Works, vol. vi, 622.

Here, then, we meet with what was probably the first objection ever urged against the Wesleyan doctrine; namely, that it was the laying claim to a blessing the enjoyment of which had long since ceased.

This is an objection very difficult to deal with; for, as it rests on no evidence, it is not very likely to yield to conviction.

If a man be bent on believing that the privilege belonged exclusively to the times of the apostles, it may be next to impossible to persuade him to the contrary. No belief is so obstinate and unassailable as that which is built solely on the determinations of self-will.

It is obvious, however, that any other, or every other, part of Christianity might just as plausibly be explained away, as is the office of the Spirit of adoption, by alledging that it was a privilege confined to the apostolic age. The only answer to such a summary dismissal of a vital Christian doctrine is this:—That there is not a shadow of evidence of the divine intention that such privilege should cease. It is neither asserted by any inspired writer, that the enjoyment was to be temporary; nor can it be concluded, by fair inference, from anything written in the book of God.

The archbishop's theory was, that there are

three ways in which the Holy Spirit may be said to bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God—first, by external, miraculous attestations; secondly, by internal, plainly perceptible whispers; or, by some kind of impressions equivalent thereto; thirdly, by his standing testimony in the Holy Scriptures. "The apostles," he continues, "had all these three;—Origin and Chrysostom probably the two latter. But, if St. Bernard—several hundred years after—pretended to any other than the third, his neighbors would naturally ask for proof, either that it *should be* so, by Scripture, or that it *was* so, by facts."

Thus this able divine, and very learned man, (for such, whoever he was, we must allow him to have been,) conceived of the privileges of Christians as diminishing with the lapse of time; being, in the times of Chrysostom, less than in the days of the apostles; and still further curtailed in the age in which St. Bernard lived.

"Let us then," says Mr. Wesley, "suppose St. Bernard and one of his neighbors to be talking together on this subject." On St. Bernard's saying, "*The Spirit of God bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God;*" his neighbor replies, "I suppose he does; but not by an inward perceptible testimony."

"ST. BERNARD.—*Yes, by an inward, plainly perceptible testimony. I now have this testimony in myself. I plainly perceive that I am a child of God, and that it is his Spirit that testifies it to my spirit.*"

"NEIGHBOR.—I fear you are somewhat enthusiastically given. I allow God's standing testimony in the Scriptures. But I cannot allow that there is now any such thing as this *inward* testimony, unless you can either prove, by Scripture, that it *should be* so; or, by facts, that it *is* so."

"B.—*Are not these words Scripture, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God?'*"

"N.—Yes; but the question is, How are they to be understood? For, I deny that they speak of an inward testimony. They speak of the outward, standing testimony of God, in the Holy Scriptures."

"B.—*You put a manifest force upon the text. You cannot prove that it speaks of any outward testimony at all. But the words immediately preceding prove, to a demonstration, that it speaks of an inward testimony: 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear;' (Is not fear an inward thing?) 'but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry,*

Abba, Father.' 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,'—even the same Spirit which 'God hath sent forth into our hearts.'"

"N.—I do not deny that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit; but I deny your peculiar interpretation of this text. I deny that this text at all favors an inward perceptible testimony."

"B.—*The Spirit which God hath sent into my heart, and which now cries in my heart, Abba, Father, now beareth testimony with my spirit, that I am a child of God. How can these words be interpreted at all, but of an inward perceptible testimony?*"

"N.—I tell you of God's standing testimony in Scripture."

"B.—*This is a palpable violence to the texts. They no more speak of Scripture than of miracles. They manifestly speak of what passes in the heart, the spirit, the inmost soul of a believer, and of that only.*"

Upon the whole, there are probably few who would *now* have recourse to this theory, that the privilege of the Spirit of adoption was, indeed, enjoyed in the apostolic times, but that it ceased at some period, no one knows when. At least, it seems to devolve on those who hold this notion of a continually diminishing privilege,

"to show," as the archbishop says, "either, from Scripture, that it *should be* so; or, from facts, that it *is* so." Neither Scripture nor facts will bear out any such theory. There is not a word in the book of God which could lead an attentive reader to suppose that any portion of the privilege of believers, in reference to the knowledge of their own personal salvation, was of a temporary nature; or that it was intended, after a lapse of years, to cease. And, as little is there in the experience of those who live near to God to establish any such supposition. The evidence, both of Scripture and of facts, so far as it goes, is in proof that we are permitted to expect now the same happiness which believers enjoyed from the beginning.

2. There is, however, another objection, which proceeds nearly on the same ground as the foregoing. It is to this effect: "This doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is nothing else, in fact, but the laying claim to a new inspiration."

This appears to assume, that the Wesleyan doctrine teaches those who hold it to expect to be apprised of something beyond what is contained in Holy Scripture. This, however, is an entire mistake. We know and acknowledge that no new revelation, on any point of Christian doctrine, is to be anticipated. The book

of God is complete :—the volume of inspiration is sealed. But this persuasion is perfectly consistent with the belief, that an influence of the Spirit upon the mind of man is absolutely necessary, in order that the divine book may produce that effect upon those who receive it which it was intended to produce. This is all for which we contend. No new revelation is, indeed, necessary. But, neither the promises nor the threatenings can produce any saving effect, without an application to the individual mind. In producing conviction of sin, the Spirit operates as directly upon the soul as he does in assuring us of our adoption. No sinner, without an immediate interposition of the Holy Ghost to apply the word, ever trembled under the apprehension of his guilty and miserable estate. He must hear an inward voice saying, "Thou art the man!" No one, however, thinks of calling this a "new revelation." It is almost universally recognized as the ordinary operation of the Holy Spirit to convince of sin. In doing this, that divine Agent does but apply particularly that which the word of God reveals generally. Our own personal concern in the threatenings, on the one part, or in the promises on the other, can only be made known to us by an immediate agency of the Holy Spirit upon our minds. If

we contend for a direct operation of the Spirit to certify the fact of our adoption; it is equally true that the generality of those who object to this do yet believe in a direct operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind to convince the sinner of his sin. The cases, as far as we can perceive, are exactly parallel. The office of the spirit of bondage answers precisely to that of the Spirit of adoption. The mighty working of the Holy Ghost, in the character of a reprover of sin, and a revealer of our spiritual bondage, prepares us for recognizing him as also witnessing our new relation to God, when, by justification, that change in our relation to our heavenly Father takes place. He who believes in the former operation of the Holy Spirit may also surely believe in the latter. But in neither case is there any ground for asserting that the Holy Ghost communicates anything new, in addition to an existing revelation. He merely gives us to see our interest in a revelation already made.

3. "But at least," says the objector, "your doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is *new;* and whatever is new in divinity is false."

There is undoubtedly a sense in which it may be correctly asserted, that whatever is new in theological opinion must be false. Any senti-

ment which had never entered into the mind of good men at any previous period would unquestionably labor under the disadvantage of having a strong presumption lying against its correctness; and if it were no more found in Holy Scripture than in the writings of good men, its claims must be at once rejected. But the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit does not lie open to either of these imputations. It is clearly assumed in every Scriptural account of the religious state of Christ's disciples. In several scriptures it is distinctly mentioned; and it finds a place in the writings of the holiest and wisest men. For the establishment of the latter part of this assertion, which alone requires our present attention, (the Scriptural authority of the doctrine having been considered before,) let it be remarked that many of the best English divines have held that there is a witness of the Spirit to the believer's adoption, and have spoken of it in language which implies that they considered it to be a direct testimony, borne by the Spirit of God to the soul of man. Take, as a proof of this, the following extracts:—"The Spirit which God hath given us" is "to assure us that we are the sons of God, and to enable us to call upon him as our Father."—HOOKER. "It is one great office of the Holy Ghost to ratify

and seal up to us the forgiveness of sins."—Bishop Brownrigg. "It is the office of the Holy Ghost to assure us of the adoption of sons, to create in us a sense of the paternal love of God toward us, and to give us an earnest of our everlasting inheritance."—Bishop Pearson. "From adoption flows all a Christian's joy; for the Spirit of adoption is, first, *a witness;* secondly, *a seal;* and, thirdly, the *pledge* and *earnest* of our inheritance; setting a holy security on the soul, whereby it rejoiceth, even in affliction, in hope of glory."—Archbishop Usher. "This is that *πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας*, that Spirit of adoption, which constituteth us the sons of God; certifying us that we are so, and causing us, by a free instinct, to cry, Abba, Father."—Doctor Barrow.*

It may appear strange and inexplicable, supposing this to be the correct view, that the privilege of receiving the Spirit of adoption should have been so little dwelt upon; that a blessing of such inestimable value should have been so rarely described and enforced; that it should even, at length, have been almost lost sight of and forgotten; for we acknowledge this to be the fact. Little is said, in the immense range

* For additional testimonies, see Note B., *Appendix.*

of English theology, upon the blessedness of a consciousness of the divine favor. We find just sufficient to prove that the Wesleyan doctrine is not a new and unheard-of notion; but we do not find that it has ever had that prominence assigned to it which, from its vital importance, it might seem to claim.

We easily account for this. Experimental religion, in the church of Christ, has been at a low ebb. What was scarcely enjoyed in the experience of any who called themselves Christians, was not likely to be held up and enforced as the common privilege of believers. Theoretically, it might still be held as the right interpretation of Scripture; but, experimentally, it was almost a lost blessing. Such was the case when, little more than a century ago, God in his great mercy began a revival of the work of experimental religion. It is interesting to look back on some events which then occurred. There arose on the voyage out, as Mr. Wesley sailed to America, a fearful storm, and all on board entertained the most serious apprehensions of going to the bottom. It was then that this great man began to perceive that the members of the Moravian church, who sailed in the same vessel, were possessed of a secret to which he was a stranger. While the paleness of fear,

or the shriek of agonized despair, was witnessed among the rest of the passengers, these pious Moravians were calm and fearless. They knew in whom they had believed. The privilege of Christians to be assured of their acceptance with God, was one which that church still held fast; and the members of the Moravian societies seem very generally to have lived in the enjoyment of the blessing. In contrasting his own fears with their calmness and confidence, Mr. Wesley might well say, (as he afterward did, on reviewing the matter,) "I went to America to convert the Indians; but O, who shall convert me!"

It was not long, however, before both Wesley and Whitefield (for in this they were equal) preached the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit from their own happy experience of its truth; and the inference to be drawn is, that this doctrine is in no other sense "new" than that there has been a recovery and revival, during the last century, of a doctrine which had almost gone into oblivion, through the declining state of religion in the world.

4. "But," says another objector, "what you term the direct witness of the Spirit needs, according to your own account of it, to be confirmed by a reference to the fruits of the Spirit. You allow that, apart from them, it is not to be

depended upon. It appears, therefore, after all, to be an assurance which makes nothing sure."

Now, it is true that we do insist on the importance of uniting, with the direct witness of the Spirit of God, the evidence deduced from the fruits of the Spirit. We also allow that the witness of the Spirit, if it were professed to be enjoyed where no gracious fruits of holy influence could be discerned, would justly be suspected as a delusion. But we also know that the witness of the Spirit, where it is genuine and accordant with Scripture, is never found apart from the Scriptural marks of sonship. Wherever the former is, there also are the latter. In the first instance, the Spirit's witness is of such a delightfully convincing character, that, independently of all examination, and prior to all reasoning on the subject, the believing soul gives utterance to the accents of filial love, and cries, "Abba, Father;" but, subsequently, there is time and opportunity given for self-examination by the word of God, and for trying ourselves by the marks of the children of God, which it contains. We lay as much stress on the importance of this as the objector himself can do; and by attending to the united and conjoint testimony of the Spirit of God and of our own spirit, we secure both the *comfort* and the

safety of the believer. These are the two points to which we direct our solicitude; because for both of these, in equal measure, we find that provision is made in the gospel. It is our deliberate persuasion that the true comfort of the soul, being the result of its joyous perception of our heavenly Father's love, cannot be produced in any other way than by the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit. Whether I am forgiven, or am still under condemnation; whether I am adopted into the divine family, or am still a stranger and an alien, is to me a most momentous question. Is there any means of having this question solved? We believe there is. We believe that, in conjunction with our being adopted into the family of God, there is given to us the Spirit of adoption, producing in us an assurance of the pardoning love of God. Thus the comfort of the soul is secured, and all the exhilarating and animating effects follow which develop themselves in strenuous obedience and entire devotedness. But, inasmuch as not comfort alone, but safety, is requisite,—as it is needful to guard against the possibility of a man's deceiving himself, by supposing that he has the witness of the Spirit, when in fact he has not,—we still follow the Scripture in teaching that the evidence, in order to be satis-

factory, must be twofold. There must be the witness of our own spirit, or the inference drawn from perceiving the correspondence of our hearts and lives with the marks of God's children which his book contains.

There can be, therefore, in the Wesleyan method of stating this privilege, no ground for complaining of its want of certainty. The utmost certainty that can be conceived, is, by the twofold evidence, obtained. The believer himself is filled with unspeakable comfort, by the direct testimony of the Spirit of adoption. Then, for the purpose of confirming him in the persuasion that this is no delusive or imaginary enjoyment, there are produced in him the fruits of the Spirit;—"love, joy, peace;"—filial trust; the spirit of obedience; child-like submission to his heavenly Father's will; and every other distinguishing mark of the children of God.

If it be said that the latter, or indirect testimony, is quite sufficient without any direct attestation of the divine Spirit to the soul, we can only reply, that we have never, in our observation, found it to be so. We do not find that an *exclusive* reliance upon the evidence derived from the most careful and proper self-examination, has ever produced, independently of the Spirit's testimony, a satisfactory and joyous per-

suasion of sonship; such as is necessary to the true comfort and energy of the believer. The setting aside of the Spirit's office, as the Spirit of adoption, and the excluding of all testimony except what is drawn from inferential evidence, appears to us equally to set aside one of the most delightful privileges of Christianity;—the sure and sober certainty of our acceptance with God.

5. "But your doctrine," it is further objected, "is bigoted and unsocial. You anathematize a large portion of your fellow-Christians, by teaching that none are the children of God except those who have the direct witness of the Spirit to the fact of their adoption. Now, the majority of those, whom you cannot deny to be real Christians, do not profess to enjoy any such privilege."

To this we have to reply, that we anathematize none. We would judge no man. If he be a professed servant of Christ, to his own Master he standeth or falleth. If he have not been in the habit of hearing the whole truth, and if the Scriptures have been explained to him otherwise than we think is their genuine meaning, it would be unreasonable to require of him that he should be in every point theoretically right. Yet substantially, and in the general character

of his experience, he may be a real disciple of the Saviour. His heart may be much better than his head.

We acknowledge as genuine Christians "all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." They possess the incontestable mark of discipleship;—that which is of so much importance, that all else, in comparison with it, is as the small dust of the balance. We are sure that the maxim, "We love Him because he first loved us," must remain true; that we must know the Saviour's love to us before there can be any return of love to him. Consequently, wherever there is a real love to the Lord Jesus Christ, there has been previously a manifestation of his love to that soul; and such a manifestation as only the Spirit of God can give. Having this love to Christ, which can only spring from his revealed love to us,—these, our fellow-Christians, must needs be the excellent of the earth. At the same time that they deny in their creed the possibility of any direct testimony of the Spirit to their sonship, they do in reality and substantially enjoy this inestimable blessing. They may not interpret Scripture with the most entire correctness;—they may deprive themselves of some comfort. But, if they love the Saviour, their hearts are right with God, and

there would be found no essential difference between their experience and that of their Wesleyan fellow-Christians.

Let it not, however, be said that, "if this be correct, it matters but little whether we hold the doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit or not, seeing that in the end the same result is produced, either with it, or without it." We cannot allow that it is a matter of small moment whether we interpret Rom. viii, 16, to mean that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; or whether it only means, that the Spirit has recorded something in the inspired volume from which we may infer it. The right interpretation of Scripture is a matter of primary importance. Besides, there is involved in this, the question whether there be any such office of the Spirit as that of the "Spirit of adoption." What that expressive phrase, "the Spirit of adoption," can signify, if it does not mean that the Spirit of God is given to witness our adoption, it would be difficult to say. And, if it be his office to witness our adoption, the giving of such testimony can hardly mean, that he laid down the marks of it in the Scripture two thousand years ago.

But if, independently of all other considerations, it is important to ascertain the exact mind

of the Spirit in the Scriptures, it is especially so when it is considered, that a correct belief on this point must have its influence on all the enjoyments, and, indeed, on all the inward life of believers. There will be some, it is true, whose experience will go beyond their creed; who, while they deny to believers the privilege of having the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given to them, are yet in reality partakers of this blessing; the very existence of which they have been taught to doubt. But, generally, it will be otherwise. In all ordinary cases, the depressing influence of a defective creed will be felt to be injurious. Men will not seek that which they have no hope of obtaining. For want of the persuasion that it is their privilege to receive the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, the generality will remain destitute of the blessing. It cannot be to them an object of desire and prayer, if they have been taught to believe it impossible. And thus, while the standard of Christian experience is placed too low, many will go on their way mourning under doubts and fears, when "the joy of the Lord" would be their "strength." They will do the work of the Lord imperfectly, *as servants*, while they might labor with the energy which *filial love* inspires.

6. But, again it is objected: "We need no other witness than that which the Spirit bears in his work upon the human heart, and in the change which he produces there."

This appears to be the view to which the most respected divines, among the nonconformists of the present day, incline. The Rev. J. A. James has given us his views of this interesting subject, in the fourth of his "Pastoral Addresses," in which he treats of "the full assurance of hope."

Some of Mr. James's objections to the doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit have already been sufficiently met. But he insists strenuously that it is unnecessary; and calls in the testimony of Dr. Wardlaw, to bear him out in the assertion. The doctor's theory agrees substantially with that of Mr. James. "The Holy Spirit," says this very eminent Scotch writer,* "speaks in the word. The same Spirit operates in the heart. There must be a correspondence between his testimony in the word and his operation in the heart. The evidence lies in this correspondence." Now, we do not deny that there is *an* evidence derived from this correspondence. But the question is, whether this

* Doctor Wardlaw, on Assurance, page 104.

is *the* evidence which the apostle alludes to, when he speaks of God *sending the Spirit* of his Son INTO THE HEARTS *of believers*, and of his *bearing witness with their spirits*, &c. The doctor apparently thinks it is; for he says,—"What the Spirit of God has wrought in us, harmonizes with what the Spirit of God testifies in the word; and in proportion as our spirits have the inward consciousness of this harmony, do we possess the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God." Now in reference to this decision, which appears to be laid down with great confidence as to its correctness, we would ask, first: Is it the plain, obvious, and common sense interpretation of the passages we have adverted to? (Rom. viii, 16; and Gal. iv, 6.) Would any plain man, by reading ever so frequently the epistle of St. Paul, have gathered that the testimony of the Spirit was given, not in the believer's heart, but *in the Scriptures*.

We would ask, secondly: Does not the weight of authority, among the ablest divines—at least till the last half century—lie directly against such an interpretation of Rom. viii, 16? From Chrysostom to Calvin,*—from Bishop Brownrigg to Bishop Gibson—all have interpreted it

* See their testimonies in the Appendix.

substantially as we do. None seems to have dreamed, that there was anything, in that passage, about the testimony of the Spirit *in the Scriptures.*

Above all, we would ask—on the supposition that no other evidence is to be looked for than that of inference—Will not the number, in point of fact, be found to be very small, of those who attain a satisfactory assurance of their adoption? and will *their* "full assurance of hope" ever, except in some favored instances, be free from the admixture of doubts and fears?

It will not avail to say, that a clear assurance is not necessary, inasmuch as there may be true piety without it. We repeat the conviction, which we expressed before, that though there may be *sincere*, there cannot be *deep and fervent*, piety, without such an assurance of our heavenly Father's love as inspires joy into the heart, and vigor into all acts of obedience. Now, it becomes a serious question, How many, out of a large Christian church, will be found happy in God—rejoicing in him evermore, and serving him with the vigor which filial love inspires—if they are taught that no evidence of their adoption is to be hoped for, except such as results from comparing themselves with the requirements of God's word? Will they not say,

"Alas! we find, in ourselves, no such conformity between our character and that which distinguishes the children of God, as can lead to any satisfactory conclusion, on our part, as to our state?"

When these complaints are heard, (and we apprehend they are not uncommon,) there is reason to fear that the individuals uttering them are not in a justified state, and that they will look in vain for the *external* marks of sonship, until the Spirit of God has introduced the *inward* graces which immediately attend on justification; namely, peace with God, love to God, and joy in God. Where these are, according to the full import of the terms, the individual possesses all which we include in the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, whether that doctrine form part of his creed or not. But we cannot conceive of a justified condition as existing without them. When the apostle says, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God," he must surely mean a *conscious* peace. When he says, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost," he must also mean a *conscious* love; leaving no doubt of its own existence. Now, if a man have so believed as to obtain the love of the Saviour in his heart, and to possess conscious

peace with God; whatever may be the terms he uses in speaking of his religious enjoyments, we are persuaded that he is made a partaker of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of adoption. By no other agency than that of the Spirit could this peace, this love, and this joy be given. They are not, in any sense of the word, inferential; and the conscious assurance which they minister of our adoption into the family of God, is not the result of any investigation of our state; but springs up in the soul prior to all reasoning on the matter.

Where, then, the doctrine of justification by faith is so preached, as that the *immediate fruits*, which the Scriptures ascribe to it, are much insisted on; where peace, and love, and joy, are represented as the peculiar possession of the justified soul—we do not perceive any material difference between such preaching and that which is heard from Wesleyan pulpits, either in its character or in its results; and we are persuaded, that all which is deep and fervent in piety will there be found. But where, instead of this, the *more remote effects*—as, for instance, keeping God's commands, are represented as being themselves the witness of the Spirit—those remote effects, we think, will often be looked for in vain, or the evidence derived

from them will be insufficient to produce the loving confidence of a child toward a father. This is the defect which runs through the whole of Mr. James's lecture on "the full assurance of hope;" in which, apart from this, there occur many excellent and useful observations. He seems to bring his reasonings on this important subject to a point in the following sentence, which, to direct special attention to it, he has put in italics: "*Hereby we know Christ: hereby we know that Christ loves us if we keep his commandments.*" Can Mr. James explain how, and by what means, we are to keep the commandments of Christ without *the previous existence* of that very thing—namely, the manifested love of Christ, which he says can only *follow* the observance of the Redeemer's law? Who ever kept the commandments of Christ without first loving Christ? And who ever loved Christ without first feeling Christ's love to him? The system which Mr. James and Dr. Wardlaw sanction with their honorable names appears to involve the fault which the Greeks termed *υστεροπρωτον*, and which we, in familiar language, call "putting the cart before the horse." The Scriptural order we take to be this: First, with a penitent heart, we believe

Christ's love to us, and to believe is to feel; immediately, we love him in return for his love; then, as the sure result, we keep his commandments.

Mr. James's final dictum, that "we know Christ loves us if we keep his commandments," is very Scriptural and good—nothing could be better—supposing him to speak of the *confirmatory* evidence, intended to preserve the believer from all danger of self-deception; an evidence subsequent and subordinate to the revelation of Christ in the heart. But nothing can be further from the mark, if he speaks of the *primary evidence* of sonship. This must be of a more direct character than any self-examination as to whether we keep the commandments can possibly bestow. Wherever the doctrine of justification by faith alone is fully and clearly preached, it appears to us that there must be appended to it—if indeed it be not an essential part of it—the announcement of a *present conscious enjoyment* of the blessing of pardon. And whether this be called by one name or another, is not very important. It is, in fact, the Wesleyan doctrine of the witness of the Spirit; and we are persuaded that this great Protestant doctrine of a gratuitous justification of the sin-

ner, through faith, is but partially and defectively preached, if it do not include, substantially, the further testimony, that justification and the Spirit of adoption are inseparable.

CHAPTER IX.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

THE writer of this little work would not dismiss it from his hands without a few words of invitation and admonition, addressed to those of his readers who may, thus far, have favored him with a serious perusal of its pages. Laying aside all further discussion of the doctrinal principles here advanced, he would wish to dwell a little on the importance of the manifested favor of God; and on the right method of obtaining and securing the invaluable privilege.

Let me suppose, my reader, that in thee I have been favored with the attention of one who has not been taught to expect any comfortable assurance of salvation. And, as the experience of a believer does not usually rise above his creed, (although, as we have allowed, it may sometimes do so,) I may be permitted to suppose that you possess no such evidence of your adoption into God's family as enables you

to conclude, with any certainty, that your spiritual state is safe. At all events, through the occurrence of doubts and fears, it is far from being happy.

Or, while "the assurance of hope,"—which we, by an equally Scriptural phrase, call "the witness of the Spirit,"—has been represented to you as your privilege, you have been told that you are not to expect this in any other way than by an inference drawn from comparing your religious character with the word of God. How then, let me ask, stands the case with you now? Have you any confidence,—deserving the name of confidence,—that God for Christ's sake has blotted out your sins? You confess that you have not; and you are, perhaps, willing to make the avowal, that you do not feel your spiritual state to be, in that respect, satisfactory to yourself. Now, I wish only to impress upon your mind the conviction, that you are living beneath your privileges. Far be it from me to depreciate whatever of good the blessed Spirit of God has wrought within you. You fear the Lord, and tremble at his holiness; and, being of an humble and contrite spirit, you have the promise that the Lord will look upon you. Your regard for the authority of God is sufficient to preserve you from open sin; from the pursuit

of the world's polluting pleasures; and from the madness and misery of those who, reckless of an approaching eternity, are living only for the present world. In short, you are a servant;—sincere, conscientious, and laborious;—a *servant*, however,—not a *son*. Comparing yourself with what is written in the New Testament of the first followers of the Redeemer, you perceive, that what is said of their religious enjoyments does not accord with the general strain of your feelings. They rejoiced, and gave thanks evermore. "We joy in God," said they, "through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have now received the atonement." "In whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." "We have received the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God."

Now, we cannot but regret that you have not been instructed and led to seek those views of Christ which the Spirit of adoption alone can give, and those feelings which are their immediate and sure result. Apart from these, you cannot be possessed of that comfort, nor inspired with that energy in the Lord's service, which are so desirable for you as a Christian. It is not a matter of small importance, that you are

depriving yourself of comfort. The smile of God constitutes the happiness of heaven. The light of his favor, shining full on angelic and redeemed spirits, fills them with sensations of the most rapturous bliss. And, on earth, it is only where a sense of his favor is enjoyed that true happiness is known. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is, beyond all question, a happy religion. It is intended and adapted to diffuse peace and joy on earth. Gladness of heart, as well as singleness of heart, should distinguish his followers now, as they did in the first church at Jerusalem. For the honor of religion, therefore, and for the sake of that Saviour whose name you bear, determine not to rest satisfied without that sense of the divine acceptance with which true happiness dwells. It is equally conducive to spiritual energy as it is to happiness. Your heart will be lifted up in the ways of the Lord; and your spirit will be prepared for every emergency. Called to make sacrifices, the requisite self-denial and resolution will enable you to think them light. Called to the performance of arduous duty, it is your conscious relationship to God which will keep you from shrinking, however formidable the task.

In short, no words of mine, I trust, are need-

ful to show you, that it is a great and unspeakable blessing to walk in the clear light of the divine favor. And if this be, as we believe it is, the privilege of all the genuine disciples of the Saviour,—it is, beyond doubt, a most invaluable privilege. If, while you allow its value, you cannot yet be brought to see that it is a blessing designed for you; and one which you may freely receive;—read, once more, the New Testament carefully through; with prayer to God for especial illumination on this point. In doing this, attend to the following suggestions. Pay particular attention to those passages which speak of the privilege of adoption as belonging to all the children of God; and mark how the Scriptures represent it to be one of the peculiar titles of the Holy Spirit to be called, "The Spirit of adoption;" for no other reason, apparently, but because he *witnesses* this adoption of believers into the family of God; and seals the sense and persuasion of it on their loving hearts. Consider especially St. Paul's train of observation, bearing on this point, in the early part of the eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; and of the fourth chapter to the Galatians. Consider whether it does not appear, that the Spirit of adoption is sent into the heart of him that believes, to attest his sonship. Moreover,

weigh the import of those passages which represent the happiness, the joy, the peace, of all that have believed; and consider whether that happiness, and peace, and joy, are not the immediate fruit of the Spirit, wrought by him in the heart of the believer, rather than the result of any reasoning on our religious state. Consider all the passages that treat of the indwelling of the Spirit in believers. Observe, that all Christians are said to *live in* the Spirit,—to *walk in* the Spirit,—to be *led by* the Spirit,—to be *filled with* the Spirit,—to be *sealed by* the Spirit,—to have the *earnest of the Spirit* in their hearts. Think, whether it is possible to suppose, that the first Christians,—those who really loved the Lord Jesus Christ,—were, or could be, in a state of doubt, as to the happy relation in which they stood to God. And, if you are impressed with the conviction, while you read, that these first disciples were happy in God,—rejoiced in the clear light of his favor,—and felt themselves heirs of his eternal glory,—remember that no change has taken place either in the characters or immunities of true Christians. What was their privilege *then*, remains so still. The examination of the New Testament, with the sincere intention of discovering what was the experience of the first believers, in reference to

this privilege of the "full assurance of hope," which we have supposed them to enjoy, cannot but be useful to you. We are so fully persuaded of the sufficiency of the Scriptural evidence, to prove this point to the satisfaction of every candid mind, that we are well content to rest the matter there. But let the inquiry be prosecuted with earnestness. It is no unimportant and trivial matter to have the question rightly decided. "It is your life." Let it especially be entered upon with prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. For there is nothing in which his sacred teachings are more needful, than in reference to the character and amount of our religious privileges. If you thus sincerely, diligently, and prayerfully, endeavor to settle the question, whether there be such a privilege as the witness of the Spirit of adoption,—we may confidently leave the decision of it to your own candid and enlightened judgment.

It is to another class of readers that I would now address myself. You believe, theoretically, that this is indeed one of the most valuable enjoyments of the Christian believer; without, however, so seeking as to obtain the

blessing for yourself. I assume that, among those who may peruse this little volume, there may be persons of this class; as, indeed, they are found, more or fewer in number, in almost all our societies. I address myself to you in the language of affectionate admonition. There is a defect in your religious experience; which is the more to be regretted, because it is in direct opposition to your creed. It is a defect which should lead to deep and serious searchings of the heart; as, according to our solemn conviction, it can be chargeable only on yourself. For, the blessing of the witness of the Spirit, wherever it is sought earnestly, and according to the gospel method, is, we think, always obtained.

Ascertain, if it be possible, the hidden cause which has hitherto kept you from the enjoyment of so valuable a blessing. Entreat the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to enable you to see what has prevented you from exercising such a faith in the atonement as bringeth salvation. It may be that some defective views of the freeness of divine grace—some indistinct apprehensions of the character of faith as a simple trust in the promise—some magnifying of the claims of justice against the tenderness of divine mercy—something of this kind has

prevented your reposing an entire confidence in the goodness of your pardoning God. These are matters requiring very clear and discriminating views; especially in minds of a highly intellectual order; and these discriminating views the Holy Spirit alone can give. The clouds and darkness in which the intellect often seems to be involved in reference to them can only be dissipated by the Spirit's inward and celestial light; before which all difficulties and doubts melt away as mists before the sun.

Or, inquire if the hinderance to your finding this peace of God may not exist rather in some perversion of the will than in a want of light in the understanding. There may be a setting up of our own will in opposition to the gospel method in reference to the manner and circumstances of this divine communication. We may wish to receive it in our own way. But God's method of bestowing it may require the sacrifice of all our preconceived notions. If your will, therefore, be not brought into subjection to the divine will—at least so far that you are entirely willing to be saved in the way and method in which it may please God to bestow the blessing—this may account for your not having hitherto received a conscious sense of the divine favor.

Nor let it be forgotten, that He who has a right to demand, in all things, our absolute submission and acquiescence, may require of us something even beyond the renunciation of our *will*. The cause of his withholding from us the sense of his forgiving love may exist among the things to which there is an attachment of the *affections*. There may be an idolatrous regard to some created good which must be put away. At least, it is on this ground only that we can account for the delay of comfort which occurs in the case of some apparently sincere souls, who remain long seeking—perhaps "with strong crying and tears"—the blessing of conscious pardon. We cannot but suppose that there is something of which God demands the sacrifice, and which is not yet given up. We refer here, of course, to some secret idolatry of the heart, and not to its lawful affections, which we cannot suppose will ever prove an obstacle to the obtaining of salvation. Now, although the *immediate* cause, which deprives the soul of the comforts arising from a sense of adoption, is, in all cases, the want of a true faith, as a simple reliance on the atonement; yet the *remote* cause may generally be found in one or more of the things we have named. A want of clearness in the mental

vision—a want of submission in the will—or some disorder in the affections of the mind, may be the secret obstacle to the exercise of a justifying faith; and, consequently, a hinderance to the peaceful and joyous persuasion of our sonship.

To detect this hidden cause, whatever it may be—and to obtain the removal of it—should be your first and most anxious concern. Permit a well wisher to your soul's best interests to endeavor to impress you with the importance of obtaining, without any further delay, the blessing of the witness of the Spirit. If you can be once brought to a deep conviction of the necessity of this to your happiness—and to act under the full influence of that conviction—your earnestness in the pursuit of what is your undoubted privilege will soon be crowned with success. At the risk of being chargeable with reiterating the same sentiment, we repeat that this is, and must be, the life of all your enjoyments. How can a creature, whose dependence, each moment, for all good, is on the great Jehovah, need to be reminded that the favor of God, his manifested favor, is better than life; and more valuable than all which life contains! This truth is so evident that you cannot doubt of it. But this is not all. It is essential to

your *safety* that you should earnestly seek, until you find, a comfortable evidence of your acceptance with God. You cannot, in any other way, retain the spiritual good which you now have. It may, indeed, be asserted as a general principle, that to remain stationary in religion is impossible. Not to advance, is to recede. While this is true at every stage of our religious progress, it is emphatically true here. You have not yet obtained firm footing while you remain content without a real conversion to God; and to slide back into cold indifference and spiritual death will probably be the result. The good impressions made on your mind, if they lead you not to seek earnestly the enjoyment of conscious pardon, will die away. You will incur a fearful risk—for so all our observation convinces us—of relapsing into worldliness, or, at least, into formality; and of thus losing all that is vital in religion out of your soul.

But even should this effect not follow; and should you, in conjunction with a hundred others, whose experience accords with your own, be united together as a Christian church—how would such a united society be prepared to carry out the purposes for which the church of Christ was constituted and appointed? Would

they be able to say,—"We know that we are of God?" Would they exhibit a correct model of that happiness which Christ's religion inspires? Would they hold forth, to men around them, an attractive exhibition of what the religion of Jesus can do in raising those who possess it above the desire of this world and the fear of another? Would such a church, in short, be anything like the first churches in the honor which they brought to Christ's gospel, or in the energy which they put forth to spread it? O, surely, nothing can avail to make the Christian church what it once was, and what it ought always to be, but the fact of its members "walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost," that they may be "edified," and "multiplied."

But I will suppose that you are already convinced of the supreme importance of that state of religious experience of which you have been reading; and that you now inquire, "How shall I seek so as to secure a blessing which I feel to be necessary to my soul's happiness?"

To this momentous question we reply:—

1. Cherish that deep concern which the good Spirit of God has wrought in your heart. To be brought to a full resolve to seek what the mind is now fully persuaded to view as its privi-

lege, is a material point gained. Yield yourself to this persuasion. Tenaciously hold fast this resolve. Be much in earnest about the settlement of a question on which so much that is important depends. It is often a want of earnestness in the pursuit of this attainment which may account for its not being possessed; for God must be supposed to act on that rule which his holy word publishes:—"Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye search for me with all your heart." Many, we have reason to infer, do not find, because they do not thus seek. The measure of earnestness which they put into the pursuit bears no proportion to the value of its object. Let it be impressed on your mind that, at the present, you have one great business to attend to; and that, while this remains undone, nothing else can be well done. Be persuaded that this deserves to be sought first of all, and resolve thus to seek it. Determine that nothing on which the heart has been heretofore set shall stand in the way of so desirable a result. Give up every idol of the heart; and this may include more than the giving up of everything which is plainly sinful. Things which, in other circumstances, would be in a great measure innocent, may here be greatly injurious. The soul that is bent upon pressing into the kingdom of heaven

should have nothing to distract its attention—nothing to divert its purpose. Its motto must be, "This one thing I do." Even the strong words of the poet are not too strong to express its feelings:—

> "Is there a thing beneath the sun
> That strives with thee my heart to share?
> O tear it thence, and reign alone
> The Lord of every motion there."

2. Yet, while you manifest this earnestness in seeking the blessing of the witness of the Spirit, take care to avoid legality. Seek it not as the Jews of old sought righteousness; for they, says the apostle, (Rom. ix, 32,) "sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law." This, which was a stumbling-block to the Jew, and has been so to thousands since, may, without due care, divert your mind from the right path; remember, therefore, that it is not by human might, nor by human merit, that salvation is brought into the soul. The firm resolve—the laying aside of every weight—the giving up of every idol—the strenuous use of every appointed ordinance—all this is desirable and necessary; but, at the same time, all is to be forgotten, all lost sight of, and you must fall back on the only ground of confidence—

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

It is by faith—by a simple reliance on the atonement made by the death of Christ—that you will pass from a state of condemnation to one of conscious acceptance; and whenever that interesting moment shall arrive which is to turn your darkness into day, and your mourning into rejoicing, it will be the result of an exclusive trusting in the merit of the Saviour's death and passion.

"But here," you say, "is the difficulty. How am I to believe? What is the faith by which the soul is justified? The general persuasion I have of the truth of the gospel does not bring peace into my soul. How am I to learn the particular character of that faith by which the soul trusts in Christ to the obtaining of a present salvation?" To this we reply, that, so far as the intellectual comprehension of it is concerned, you have already all the light upon the nature of faith which you can have, if you consider it to be what your language implies—a trusting in Christ for a present justification. This is its exact character. The very essence of justifying faith is this confiding trust in the death of Christ as the ground of our free justification in the sight of God. Man can teach

you no more. All beyond this, or rather the true meaning of this, must be communicated by the Holy Spirit of God. In no respect is the special teaching of the Holy One more immediately necessary than in enabling us to comprehend and understand the exact nature of justifying faith. No man ever did or ever could understand it but by an especial communication of divine teaching. We might even go so far as to say, that no man ever comprehended its precise nature until he actually enjoyed it. To know what believing is, it is necessary to believe.

It is not at all uncommon for those who are seeking salvation to be involved in great darkness and perplexity as to what is required of them in the act of believing. The faith which they need is a matter much more simple than they have ever imagined. They labor under the mistake of supposing that it is something far more complicated and far more difficult than it really is. Great obscurity as to this point rests often for a long season upon the mind; but the Spirit of God, sometimes more suddenly, and at other times more gradually, dispels it, and all is then clear as the day. So have we seen an involving mist covering and hiding from view the beauties of an extensive landscape; but the sun's rays began to penetrate through it, and

first the mountains, then the fields and streams, and, lastly, the glorious whole, shone out in all its majesty and proportions.

What that faith is which brings into the heart salvation from guilt and fear is so plain to those who have it, that they probably wonder you should find difficulties in what appears so evident to them; forgetting that they were once as much in the dark as yourselves. But be of good courage. There is a divine Teacher who will illuminate your minds. The hour draws nigh when your difficulties will vanish. Wait on the Lord, and seek him in great simplicity with all your hearts, expecting the light you need on the nature of justifying faith from this divine Teacher, and he will not long leave you in darkness.

In the mean time, while thus waiting for "the dawn of day, and the rising of the day-star in your hearts," you will do well, as St. Peter directs, to give especial heed to the word of God—the divine testimony concerning the Saviour. Let your mind be conversant with Holy Scripture; particularly with those portions of it that speak of Christ. The truth of God is the foundation on which you are to build your confidence. All the true sayings of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ are to be received

and confided in—*and this is faith.* The record —the very thing to be believed—is, that "God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." "In him was life." "He came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." "I will give," he says, "to him that is athirst, of the water of life freely." "Whosoever will, let him come." "Him that cometh, I will in nowise cast out." These, and a thousand other gracious declarations, spoken concerning the Saviour, for the encouragement of our faith, you will do well to ponder and consider. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. At the same time resolve to rest your soul on the fidelity and truth of God. Make the effort to believe. You are not to wait in passive expectation, (at least, this is not usually the best way,) not in mere listless wishes, that you might obtain this faith; but in the ardent effort to believe those truths which are within your reach. Believe as you can, if you cannot believe as you would. Your hand, it may be, is withered; but, at the command of the Saviour, stretch it out. You may not yet be able to believe the whole and entire system of that gospel truth which is to bring comfort to your soul. But a very large portion of it you *can* believe. You can believe

almost everything except your own interest in the things which are spoken. Now, in order to obtain this consummation of all your wishes, this highest and happiest exercise of the faith of a Christian, take care not to neglect what, even now, it is in your power to believe. Dwell on the wonders of redeeming mercy. Think of the infinite source of salvation in the Father's love. Think of the condescension and grace of the Saviour in ransoming you by his precious blood. Think of the patience and tenderness of the Eternal Spirit. Connected with these heart-cheering themes, there are truths to be believed in order to peace of mind. Give credit to all those things which God hath spoken; and be persuaded of your privilege to believe them *now*. Your first concern (I speak on the supposition that your heart has been made penitent on account of sin) is to believe in Christ, just as the Scripture has set him forth. Delay not, on any account, thus to believe. Some fall into mistake by supposing that they must wait until they *feel* more before they can believe; whereas the proper way is, *first of all* to believe, *in order to feel* aright. The act of believing must usually precede. The suitable feeling of the soul toward Christ will follow. And if this right order of feeling

follow not immediately, let me advise that you still continue to believe that the perfect atonement of the Saviour was offered for you. It may be your lot to be called to retain for a time, by a naked faith, your hold on Christ—*nudus nudum sequi Christum.* Despise not the day of small things. Think not lightly of this naked, unrewarded trust which you now repose in the Saviour. This simple and unrepining performance of a plain duty will, ere long, be followed by abundant consolation. Jesus Christ is set forth as your only Saviour; and, "as the besieged in a city who have every gate blocked up, and but one passage left open by which there is any possibility of escaping," so are you now "shut up unto the faith." You perceive that there is no other mode of escape. You have been brought to acquiesce entirely in this way. Be assured that it is a safe, as it is a divinely appointed one. "An open door which no man can shut" is set before you, and you have fled to it. Now, therefore, determine to put forth a vigorous, powerful, present, and continued act of that faith whose exercise does honor to the divine veracity, and, at the same time, brings heaven into the soul. "Said I not unto thee," is the word of the Saviour, "that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

This faith, so far as the grace and help are concerned by which we put it forth, is the precious gift of God. At the same time it is, through the divine goodness and grace, more within your own power than you at present imagine. God having rendered it possible for you, by the impartation of his Holy Spirit, to believe the gospel message concerning his Son, now requires it of you as a plain duty. It is no longer impracticable or impossible for you to comply with the divine command; for you are delivered from that natural incapacity of believing under which your mind long labored. If you still complain that you do not see the way, or feel the power, or understand the method of believing, we would advise you to give yourself unto prayer for this very thing. Until the dawn of heavenly light in your soul, until the rising of the day-star in your heart, you cannot do better than wait on God in solemn and earnest prayer. Between this and the faith which bringeth salvation there is so intimate a connection, and the one leads so certainly to the other, that if you have made up your mind to continue in earnest pleading for this faith until you receive it, we may congratulate you on the certainty of your succeeding. Ask, then, the gift of the revealing Spirit,

who makes known to us the things of God, and reveals the Son of God in the heart. Plead for the Spirit of adoption, whom God has engaged to send to assure you of your sonship. Be resolved to seek until you find a satisfactory assurance of the safety of your state toward God; and fear not that you shall fail.

5. You may be called to persevere in seeking this inestimable blessing, through considerable discouragement and depression. You may, for instance, stand quite alone; without a Christian friend to encourage you; without any one to counsel or direct you in the pursuit. Should this be the case, still take courage. Lose not, in the slightest degree, either heart or hope. Remember that many who are now in heaven have sustained, after the example of the Captain of their salvation, their severest mental conflicts alone. As it was said of the Saviour, that "of the people there was none with him," so have those who sought him been sometimes called to share with him the solitude of the garden. Many a contrite soul, with no other direction but the word of God, no counselor but the Eternal Spirit, no resource nor help but in prayer, has sought the Lord with crying and tears, in secret, and has found him. If, then, it should seem to be your lot to be left to

struggle alone, look upon it as one of the providential appointments of your heavenly Father, who can bring inestimable good out of what is, for the present, "not joyous but grievous." Retire into secret, with your Bible for your companion. Read, and pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Ask of Him, who will not deny your prayer, to reveal his mercy clearly to your soul. Pray for this manifested love of God, with the conviction that the blessing is to be obtained;—that thousands have obtained it;—and that God is infinitely willing to give it to you.

It may comfort you to know that even your being obliged to seek it in solitude, and without any human assistance, is one of those circumstances out of which your heavenly Father can bring good. Religion sought and found in the stillness and retirement of the closet is likely to be held fast. It is less dependent upon excitement, and strikes its roots generally in the deep and deliberate conviction of the understanding. If, therefore, you should have no human director or guide, cast yourself the more entirely on the guidance and direction of Him who is above all human teachers. He has said, "Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door .... pray to thy Father in heaven, and he will reward thee."

But if, on the other hand, you have it in your power to avail yourself of the counsels and prayers of the church, we should be inclined to say, Gladly embrace the means thus put into your hands. In all ordinary cases they will be likely to conduce to your encouragement and comfort. It enters into the gracious design of our God to make his creatures useful to each other, in the time of distress felt on account of unpardoned sin. He makes those who know the way to heaven instrumental of leading others into it, by counsel kindly administered, and by prayer believingly offered.

6. There are, indeed, times of especial visitation of heavenly influence; when many at once seek and find the blessing of pardon. These seasons of the pouring out of the Spirit, and of the consequent revival of religion, occur often in consequence of special services held, and of more fervent prayer continuously offered. We cannot expect that they will be viewed by all Christians with the same favorable eye. There are those whose calm temperament feels disturbed, and whose sensitive and refined taste is shocked by what appears to them, though incorrectly, a scene of confusion and noise. The cries of penitents for mercy, the prayers of ministers and others on their behalf, and the

directions and exhortations, quietly and in a subdued tone of voice administered to them,—all this, especially by a mere spectator who takes no part even in the prayers offered, may be felt to be by no means conducive to edification. But the lesson to be inferred is this, *that it is no place for a mere spectator.* The scene is too solemn to be turned, by any man calling himself a Christian, into the spectacle of an unemployed hour. He must lend to it the assistance of his prayers, and of his influence; or it were far better that he retired at once to his closet, to pour out his soul there.

Now, should the church be favored with one of these "times of refreshing" (*ἀναψύξεως* revival) "from the presence of the Lord," you will probably be inclined to ask, would it be advisable to avail yourself of the present season of extraordinary influence, and of the movement consequent thereupon, to seek, with increased earnestness and expectation, the salvation of your soul? Many, you perceive, are induced to seize upon the precious opportunity. They take to themselves the divine encouragement, "Now is the day of salvation." They resolve to seek it *now.* They expect to find it *now.* They determine to cast aside everything which might come between them and the object of

their intense desire—the salvation of their souls. With an earnest simplicity, which nothing but the overwhelming sense of their great need could inspire, they come forward to receive the exhortations, and to be benefited by the prayers, of their ministers and guides.

Should you, on witnessing some such scene as this, feel a degree of hesitation as to whether you ought to present yourself among the penitents, and solicit an interest in the prayers that are offered for them, it will only be necessary for you to decide, whether you can so far lose sight of self, and of the presence of man, as to have recourse to this extraordinary method in the entire simplicity of your heart. "Simplicity," says Mr. Wesley, "is that disposition of the mind which saves us from all unnecessary and unprofitable reflections upon ourselves." If your concern for the obtaining of a present salvation is sufficiently powerful to raise you above the timid inquiry, "What will the world—what will man think of me?" then go, and pray with those that pray; and join with those who, like yourself, are in earnest to find, without any longer delay, that which is so necessary to their happiness. You may safely conclude that you shall not seek it thus in vain. The mercy of God meets and distinguishes the faith of those

who thus show that there is no cross which they would not willingly take up, no sacrifice which they would not cheerfully make, in order to obtain his favor. It is the last effort of a determined faith. And it is always faith, casting itself, in absolute despair of all other help, upon the mercy of God and the atonement of Christ, which brings a consciousness of pardon to the soul. In whatever way you decide to seek the manifested favor of God, let me finally say, Be assured that the privilege is yours. Without the enjoyment of it determine not to rest. Whether sought amidst the fervent and social prayers of a revival of religion, or found in the calm retreat of the closet, in hearkening to the "still, small voice" of the Spirit—the place, the manner, and the circumstances are unimportant. But, for the blessing itself, be importunate with God. While thankful for all that divine grace has already communicated, be not satisfied with your religious state, till "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your heart, crying, Abba, Father."

APPENDIX.

NOTE A. Page 84.

It has been the most anxious wish of the author to ascertain the precise import of the original word *συμμαρτυρέω*; which, in Romans viii, 16, is rendered, "beareth witness with." This anxiety he has felt from a very early period of his ministry; a circumstance which has induced him to keep the Greek word in view in all his readings in that language; and thus to endeavor to form an unbiased opinion as to its exact signification. The result has been an entire acquiescence in Mr. Wesley's critical decision, and a conviction that there is no firm footing to be obtained anywhere, except where he finally took his stand.

It has been remarked (page 85) that Mr. Wesley hesitated to decide, at the time when he published his first sermon on the Witness of the Spirit, whether the Greek term necessarily implied, from the very construction of it, the existence of two witnesses bearing testimony to the same thing. But twenty years elapsed, during which his attention was more or less directed to this doubtful point; and he then published his second sermon, (No. 11, of the first series,) which must, in all fairness, be supposed to contain his mature and deliberate judgment on the matter. In that sermon he expresses, in very strong and decisive language, his final conviction as to the point on which he had before hesi-

tated. "It is manifest," he says, "here are two witnesses mentioned, who together testify the same thing—the Spirit of God and our own spirit. The late bishop of London, in his sermon on this text, seems astonished that any one can doubt of this, which appears upon the very face of the words."

We have here, first, the deliberate opinion of Mr. Wesley; and, where ample opportunity had been afforded for examination, on any question of classical or Biblical literature, his judgment was remarkably sound. We have, then, the authority of the bishop of London—probably Bishop Gibson—to whom Mr. Wesley refers, as a scholar whose opinion on a matter of Greek criticism ought to possess considerable weight.

Both Mr. Wesley and Bishop Gibson concur in the sentiment, that on the very face of the word *συμμαρτυρεῖ*, two witnesses appear plainly to be intended. Or, to state the same thing in other words, the Greek term, from its very construction, and from its use by the best writers, must necessarily imply at least two witnesses, testifying, in conjunction with each other, to the existence of the very same thing.

Now the amplest researches will prove these two scholars to have been perfectly correct in this decision. I have never found the word used in a different sense by any writer in any one instance. There are always, as far as I have been able to judge, two witnesses implied, as concurring in their testimony—both witnessing the same thing—and the one, by his testimony, confirming the authority of the other.

The word occurs precisely in the same form as it is used by St. Paul—the same in mood, tense, number, and person—in the third book of Xenophon's History

of Greece, (Editio. Leipsiæ, 1800, page 160.) *Ἀλλ' ὁ Ποσειδῶν ὡς μάλα σοι ψευδομένῳ κατεμήνυσεν. . . . συμμαρτυρεῖ ταῦτ' αὐτῷ καὶ ὁ ἀληθέστατος λεγόμενος χρόνος εἶναι.* "Neptune hath borne witness against thee, as a man entirely false; . . . and Time, which is said to be the truest witness, gives, with him, his concurrent testimony;" . . . literally, "bears witness with him to the same things."

It is here obvious to remark, that Neptune and Time, two imaginary Grecian deities, being the witnesses, Time bears his testimony, not *to* Neptune simply, but *in conjunction with* him. That which the older grammarians called the ablative case, has been classed, it is true, by the moderns under the same head as the dative. And it must be allowed that it is the same in form. But to suppose that, because it is called *the dative*, it must needs mean "*to*," rather than "*with*," is to show a very imperfect acquaintance with the Greek language.

The next authority for the use of the word (which I give, because I wish to present it, first, exactly and *literatim*, as it is used by the apostle) will be found in Plutarch's Life of Romulus, (Frankfort edition of 1620; vol. i, p. 39.) Even the distance of several hundred years between this writer and the one last named, may at least prove that the word never varied in its meaning through all the ages of Greek literature.

Plutarch is stating the faithful observance of the marriage tie, which prevailed among the ancient Romans; so that, for two hundred and thirty years, no man put away his wife, and no woman left her husband. This he calls the testimony of Time to the excellence of the ancient institutions. He then brings in a second source of evidence to the same point—in the friendship of the

two races of Romans and Sabines, and in their final amalgamation. Here is, first, the evidence of Time; and then the concurring evidence of the fruits, or results. *Βεβαιότητος ἣν εἰργάσατο περὶ τοὺς γάμους ὁ χρόνος ἐστι μάρτυς. . . . τῷ δὲ τοσούτῳ χρόνῳ συμμαρτυρεῖ καὶ τὰ ἔργα.* "Of the stability which he effected in reference to the ordinance of marriage, Time is witness;" (that is, the two hundred and thirty years above referred to;) "and, together with this long period, the fruits that followed bear witness."

The passages already adduced will show that this concurrence of testimony may exist where one of the parties testifying is contemplated by the writer as an intelligent being, actually existing, at least in the national creed; while the other testimony is that of circumstances, or results, or fruits. The one witness, therefore, gives *direct* testimony; the other, *indirect* and confirmatory. I think this important to be remarked, because it is perfectly similar to the use which St. Paul makes of the word.

In the next passage which we shall adduce, both the witnesses are intelligent subsistences—living persons. It occurs in Xenophon's History of Greece; from which we have already brought one example. (Oxford edit., 1703, p. 452.) *Ἔλεγε δὲ ὁ Πελοπίδας ὅτι Ἀργεῖοι καὶ Ἀρκάδες μάχῃ ἡττημένοι εἶεν. . . . συνεμαρτύρει δ' αὐτῷ ταῦτα πάντα ὡς ἀληθῆ λέγει, ὁ Τιμαγόρας Ἀθηναῖος.* "Pelopidas declared that the Argives and Arcadians were overcome in the battle, . . . and Timagoras, the Athenian, bore testimony with him that all these things were truly spoken."

We now turn to St. Chrysostom, whose knowledge of the full power of the Greek language, at least, is un-

questionable. He is, moreover, among the fathers, one of the most judicious of the commentators on Holy Scripture. This may not, indeed, be very exalted praise; for, in this province, they did not excel. But, at all events, Chrysostom knew the force of a Greek word; and we look to his comment on Rom. viii, 16, to ascertain what he thought of *συμμαρτυρεῖ*. He plainly decides for two concurring witnesses. Τὶ δὲ ἐστι, τὸ πνεῦμα τῷ πνεύματι συμμαρτυρεῖ; Ὁ παράκλητός, φησι, τῷ χαρίσματι τῷ δεδομενῷ ἡμῖν. Οὐ γὰρ τοῦ χαρίσματος ἐστι ἡ φωνὴ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ δόντος τὴν δωρεὰν, παρακλήτου. "What, then, means 'the Spirit beareth witness with spirit?' The apostle says, the Comforter bears witness with the free gift which is given unto us. For the voice is not the voice of the gift only; but also of the Comforter who giveth the gift." Here the chief evidence is the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. The subordinate evidence is the gift which this divine Comforter has freely imparted; meaning by this, apparently, the child-like spirit of love, and joy, and trust, which he has graciously produced; which is, in itself, an evidence of sonship; especially when confirmed, and rendered indubitable, by the voice of the Comforter himself.

If St. Chrysostom is not exactly right, he comes very near the truth. We have no fear that any real scholar will demur to our translation of this important testimony. But we will confirm it by appending the Latin version, just premising, that the quotation is made from the Paris edition of 1633, vol. iii, p. 194. "Quid porrò sibi vult 'Spiritus unà cum spiritu testatur?' Paracletus, inquit, cum dono nobis dato: non enim doni solum vox hæc est, sed et Paracleti, qui donum largitus est."

It may be necessary, further, to observe that, while at

least two united testimonies are always supposed wherever this verb is used, yet, in a few instances, the persons or things that conjointly give evidence may not be very distinctly named. To an attentive observer, however, the plurality of the witnesses will very plainly appear. In Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis, line 1158, there occurs a passage in which Clytemnestra says to Agamemnon,—

Συμμαρτυρήσεις ὡς ἄμεμπτος ἦν γυνὴ.

Here, at first view, it may not appear very plain who the joint witnesses are. They are, however, certainly implied in the use of the verb itself. The sense of the passage will be found, on examination, to be this: "You shall bear witness with me," (that is, you shall confirm my evidence with your own testimony,) "that I have been a blameless wife."

This observation of the occasional use of the word, where the concurring testimonies are not very distinctly marked, will apply to the two other passages of this epistle, where alone the word occurs besides in the New Testament. These are, Romans ii, 15, and ix, 1.* A plurality of evidence, in both these instances, is, with a little examination, plainly visible. In the first of these passages, the concurrence of testimony is between the inward conscience of the persons spoken of, and their external acts in their reasonings with each other.

* In Heb. ii, 34, the word is varied by the insertion of the preposition επι. Still its meaning is nearly the same; and it will be found, on examination, that the evidence it speaks of, is not only twofold, but even threefold.

In Rev. xxii, 18, the word is not only different, but the true reading, by a vast preponderance of manuscripts, is μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ. (See Griesbach's New Test.) This passage, therefore, can afford no evidence, either one way or the other.

In the latter passage, the apostle is solemnly testifying to an important truth. "I speak the truth in Christ. I lie not." We have here one witness. Where do we find the concurring evidence? I should be disposed to answer, In the direct testimony given by the Holy Ghost to the apostle's conscience. "My conscience also bearing me witness," (*συμμαρτυρούσης*—bearing a concurrent testimony,) "in the Holy Ghost."

To sum up the whole: many passages have been adduced in which a joint and concurrent testimony is most certainly signified by the word *συμμαρτυρέω*. Not one passage has yet been brought forward where the word simply means, "bears witness *to*"—or where it is used in the meaning of the uncompounded verb *μαρτυρῶ*. The preposition *συν* "*with*"—when forming part of this word—is never a mere expletive. None of the Lexicons which possess the greatest authority give any intimation that the compound verb is ever used to signify, "I bear witness *to*." Stephens's immense Thesaurus, Scapula, Hederic, and all the rest which possess any weight, render it by "*Unà testor*"—"I bear witness together with;"—"*Simul testificor*"—"I testify in conjunction with;"—"*Testimonio meo comprobo*"—"I give concurring evidence by my own testimony." And, on the whole, the evidence that St. Paul referred to two witnesses, is so strong, that we may well wonder, with Mr. Wesley and Bishop Gibson, that there should ever have been any doubt in reference to this question

NOTE B. Page 175.

ADDITIONAL TESTIMONIES.

Chrysostom is rhetorical, but powerful. (Homily on Rom. viii, Paris edition, of 1633, vol. iii, page 194.) *Ὅταν δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα μαρτυρῇ, ποία λοιπὸν ἀμφιβολία; εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἄνθρωπος, ἢ ἄγγελος, ἢ ἀρχάγγελος, ἢ ἄλλη τις τοιαύτη δύναμις τοῦτο ὑπισχνεῖτο, κἂν ἀμφιβαλλειν ἦν εἰκός τινας. Τῆς δὲ ανωτάτω οὐσιας τῆς καὶ δωρησαμένης τοῦτο . . . μαρτυρούσης ἡμιν, τίς αμφισβητήσειε λοιπόν.* "For when the Spirit beareth witness, what further hesitation can exist? If, indeed, it were a man, or an angel, or an archangel that had given the gracious assurance, some might possibly still doubt. But when the supreme Being, who is himself the Author and Source of adoption, bears his testimony, who would doubt any more?"

Calvin says,—"Neque enim sponte mens nostra, nisi preëunte Spiritûs testimonio, hanc nobis fidem dictaret." "Neither would our own mind spontaneously produce this persuasion in us without the preceding testimony of the Holy Spirit."

Erasmus says,—"Mutuum esse testimonium inter Spiritum Dei et nostrum; non quod noster spiritus confirmet Deum, sed quod sibi testis est." "The testimony of the Spirit of God, and of our own spirit, is mutual and reciprocal; not that our own spirit can add anything by way of confirming what God has testified; but still it is a witness to itself."

THE END.

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